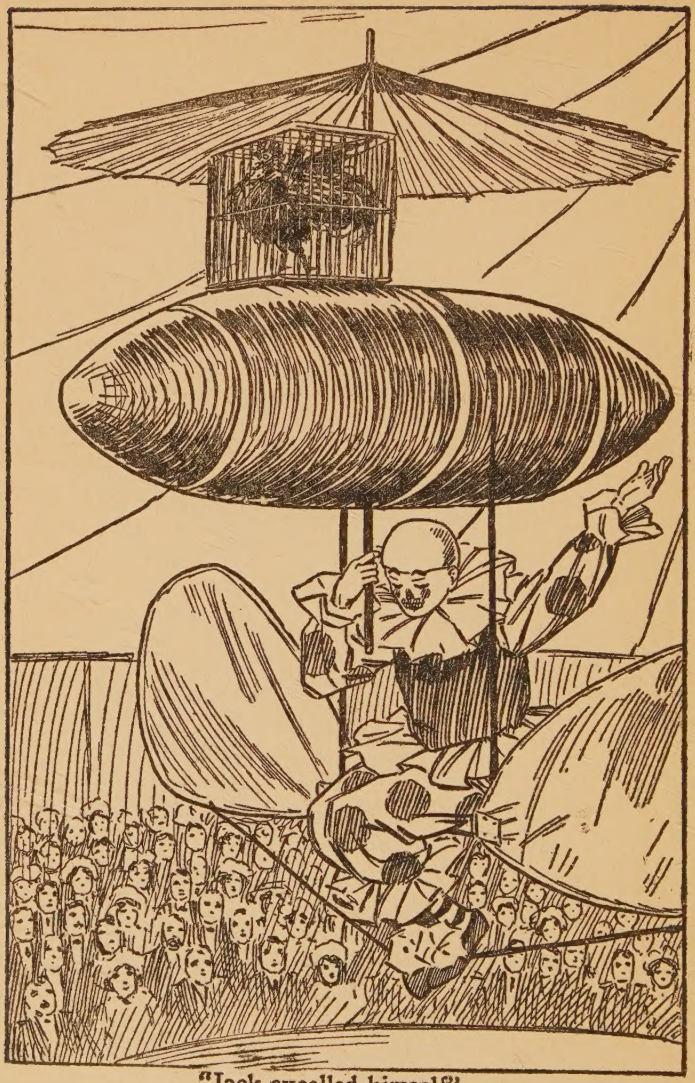
JACK THE RUNAWAY

FRANK V. WEBSTER



"Jack excelled himself"

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Jack the Runaway

Or

On the Road with a Circus

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "BOB THE CASTAWAY," "THE YOUNG FIREMEN OF LAKEVILLE," "TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY," "THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS," ETC.

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By FRANK V. WEBSTER

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JACK THE RUNAWAY, Or On the Road with a Circus

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JACK THE RUNAWAY

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JACK THE RUNAWAY

CHAPTER I

JACK WANTS A DOLLAR

"PROFESSOR, will you please give me a dollar?" asked Jack Allen, of the elderly man who sat reading a book in the library.

"A dollar, Jack?" and Professor Simonedes Klopper, who had retired from the position of mathematical instructor in a large college, to devote his declining years to study, looked over the rims of his big glasses at the boy before him. "A dollar? Why, what in the world do you want of a dollar, Jack?"

"I—I want to go to a show," and Jack rather hesitated for he was doubtful over the outcome of his request.

"A show?" and the professor's eyes opened so wide that, seen through the powerful lenses of his glasses, they reminded Jack of the orbs of a cuttlefish.

"Yes, professor. There's going to be a show in town to-night, and I'd like to go. All the boys will be there."

"Does it cost a dollar to go to a—er—a performance?"

"No; not exactly. The tickets are fifty cents, but I wanted a little extra to treat some of my chums with."

"Treat? Ah, yes, I presume you mean to furnish some sort of refreshment for your youthful companions."

"Yes, sir. Can I have the money? I haven't drawn all my allowance this month."

"No; you are correct there. There is still a balance of two dollars and thirteen cents in your allowance account for this month, computing the interest at six per cent. But I shall not give you the dollar."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because I don't choose to."

"My father would, if he was here."

"Well, he isn't here, and I'm in charge of you, and the money your parents left for your care and support while they are away. I most certainly shall not give you a dollar to waste on any such foolishness as what you term a 'show' by which I apprehend that you mean a performance of some character."

"It's a vaudeville show," went on Jack. "It's real funny."

"Funny!" ejaculated the professor with a snort. "Fun is a very poor substitute for knowledge, young man. If you have an evening to spare you should spend it on your books. You are very backward in your Latin and mathematics. When I was your age I used to devote my entire evening to working out problems in algebra or geometry."

"Will you give me fifty cents?" asked Jack desperately, not wishing to let the professor get too deep into the matter of study.

"Fifty cents? What for?"

"Well, I can go to the show for that, but I wanted some to treat the boys with. They've bought sodas for me several times, now, and I want to pay them back."

"Humph! That is all the rising generation thinks of! Having a good time, and eating! No, Jack, I shall not give you a dollar for any such purpose. And I will not give you fifty cents. Do you know that one dollar, put out at six per cent, will, if the interest be compounded, amount in one hundred years, to three hundred and forty dollars? Think of it! Three hundred and forty dollars!"

"But I don't expect to live a hundred years, professor. Besides, it's my money," spoke Jack, with just the least bit of defiance in his tone.

"It is, to a certain extent," answered the crusty

old professor, "but I am the treasurer and your guardian. I shall certainly not permit you to waste your substance in riotous living."

"I don't call it riotous living to go to a vaudeville show once in a while, and buy an ice cream soda," retorted Jack.

"You know nothing about it; nothing whatever. Now if you had asked me for a dollar, to buy some book, that would impart to you useful knowledge, I would have complied at once. More than this, I would have helped you select the book. I have a list of several good ones, that can be purchased for a dollar."

"I don't want any books," murmured Jack.

"You shall have no dollar to spend foolishly."

"I don't think it's foolish," insisted Jack. "Look here, professor, I've been studying hard, lately. I haven't had any fun in a good while. This is the first chance I've had to go to a show, and I think you might let me go. Dad would if he was here."

"You shall not go. I think I know what is best for you."

"Then I'm going anyhow!" burst out Jack. "I'm not going to stay shut up in the house all the while! I want a little recreation. If you don't give me the dollar, I'll——"

"What will you do?" asked the professor quickly, shutting his book, and standing up.

"Don't you dare to threaten me, young man! What will you do if I don't give you the dollar? I shall write to your father. The postal authorities must have located him and your mother by this time, even if they are in China."

"Haven't you had any word yet?" asked Jack, a new turn being given to his thoughts.

"No; and it is very strange. All trace of them seems to be lost after they left Hong Kong, but the letters will finally reach them. I shall inform Mr. Allen of your conduct."

"I think he'd say I was right," murmured Jack.

"That would make no difference to me," declared the professor. "I know my duty and I am going to do it. But you have not answered my question. What did you threaten to do if I did not give you the dollar?"

"I didn't threaten anything."

"You were going to."

"I was going to say if you didn't give me the dollar I'd go to the show anyhow."

"How can you go if you have no money?"

"I'll find a way. Please, Professor Klopper, advance me a dollar from my allowance that dad left with you for me."

"Not one penny for such a frivolous use as that," replied the professor firmly. "Now let me hear no more about it."

"Well, I'm going!" fired back Jack. "I'm

bound to see that show, and have a good time once in a while."

"That will do!" cried the professor so sharply that Jack was startled. "Go to your room at once. I will deal with you later. I never inflict any punishment when I am angry, and you have very nearly made me so. I will attend to your case later. Go to your room at once!"

There was no choice but to obey. Slowly Jack left the library, and mounted the stairs to his own apartment. His heart was bitter, and he was not a little worried concerning his father and mother, for, since Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester Allen had reached China, on their trip around the world, news had been received that there had been serious uprisings against the "foreign devils" as the Mongolians call people not of their race.

Jack Allen, who was a bright, sturdy youth, of about sixteen years, lived in the town of Westville, in one of our Eastern States. He was an only child, and his parents were well off.

Mr. Allen was very fond of travel, and so was his wife, but they had had little chance to gratify their tastes. A short time before this story opens Mr. Allen's firm had some business to transact abroad, in several countries. Mr. Allen was offered the chance to go, and, as it was a long-awaited opportunity he decided to take his wife,

and, while they were about it, make a tour of the world.

Jack begged hard to be allowed to go, but, as it would have broken up his schooling, and as his father wanted him to become an electrical engineer, he was, much against his will, left at home.

Jack attended the Westville Academy, and was one of the best students in that institution. When his parents decided to make their long trip, they discussed several plans of having their son taken care of while they were away. Finally they decided to send him to live with a former college instructor, Professor Klopper, who was an eminent authority on many subjects.

The professor was a bachelor, and, with an elderly sister, lived in a somewhat gloomy house on the outskirts of Westville.

There Jack had been for about a year, attending school in the meanwhile.

He had never liked Professor Klopper, for the aged man was crabbed and dictatorial, and very stern when it came to lessons. He made Jack study more than any other boy who went to the academy, and was continually examining him at home, on what he had learned in school. This, undoubtedly, was good for Jack's scholarship, but the boy did not like it.

Mr. Allen had arranged that the professor should have complete charge of Jack, and a goodly

sum had been left with the scientist for the keep of the boy.

"Give him a little spending money," Mr. Allen had said to the professor, "and see that he does not waste it."

The trouble was that the mathematical mind of the professor and the more liberal one of Jack's father differed as to what a "little spending money" was, and what was meant by "wasting" it.

The consequence was that Jack led a very miserable life with the professor, but he was too manly a lad to complain, so his letters to his parents said nothing about the disagreeable side of his sojourn with the former college teacher.

But, of late, there had come no letters from Mr. and Mrs. Allen. Jack's boyish epistles had not been replied to, and the professor's long effusions, containing precise reports as to his ward's progress, were not answered.

All trace of Mr. and Mrs. Allen was lost when they got to China, though up to now Jack had not worried about them, as he realized that mail in some foreign countries is not as certain as it is in the United States.

"Professor Klopper is the meanest old codger that ever lived!" exclaimed Jack, as he mounted the stairs to his room. "I wish dad and mother would come back. It's been a long time since I've seen them, and things are getting worse here in-

stead of better. The idea of not giving me a dollar!

"All the fellows are saying sneering things about me, too," he went on, "because I don't treat oftener. How can I treat when I don't get any money? I've a good notion to write to dad, and tell him about it. If I only knew his exact address I would, but I'll have to ask old Klopper, and then he'll catch on. No, I suppose I've got to stand it. But I wish I could see that show tonight. I wonder if I couldn't raise the money somehow? I might borrow it—no, that wouldn't do. I don't know when I could pay it back. If I had something I could sell——"

He thought a moment, and then an idea came to him.

"My catching glove!" he exclaimed. "It's a good one yet, and Tom Berwick will give me a dollar for it. If I play shortstop this summer I'll not need it. I'll sell that."

Jack, who had been rather downhearted, felt better after he had reached this decision. He began rummaging in a closet that contained various articles, more or less intimately connected with boyish sports, and presently withdrew a large, padded catching glove.

"It cost seven dollars, just before dad went away," he remarked. "It's worth three now, but I'll let Tom have it for a dollar. That will give

me enough to go to the show and treat the crowd I owe sodas to. I'll do it. I'll go to the show, no matter what Klopper says. But I've got to sneak out, for if he sees me he'll stop me. Most likely he'll be reading in the library this evening."

Jack knew his temporary guardian would not make him remain in his room without supper, for the professor was not needlessly cruel. As the June afternoon was drawing to a close, Miss Klopper, the professor's sister, came to Jack's door.

"Here is your supper," she said, handing in a tray, none too well filled. "My brother says you are to remain in your room until to-morrow morning, when he hopes you will have repented. I hope you will, too. Boys are such perverse creatures."

Jack said nothing. He took the tray, for he was very hungry. But he did not intend to remain in his room all that evening, when there was a vaudeville show in town.

"It won't be the first time I've gotten out of the window," thought Jack, when Miss Klopper had closed the door.

CHAPTER II

AT THE SHOW

JACK knew there was little fear of detection, for, on several other occasions, when he had been denied the privilege of going out on an evening, he had climbed from the window of his room, out on the roof of a low shed, and, by means of the lightning rod, to the ground. He intended doing it this time.

He finished his supper, and wished it had been larger. But he consoled himself with the reflection that he could fill the void in his stomach later with an ice cream soda.

"Now to get out," said Jack, as he went to the door and listened, to see if the professor or his sister was about. He heard nothing.

It was a small matter for the boy to get out of the window. He had wrapped the big catching glove up in a paper, and he dropped it out of the casement, so that he might have both hands free with which to climb down.

"So far, so good," he murmured, as he picked

up the glove, and started down a rear path to get beyond the house, when he would strike out for the village. But, just as he thought he was safe, he heard someone moving on the other side of a large lilac bush, and, before he could get out of the way, he was confronted by Miss Klopper. She had been out to feed a late supper to a hen and some little chickens in the lower part of the garden.

"Does my brother know you have left your room?" asked the lady of the house.

"I don't know," replied Jack.

That was truthful enough, for Mr. Klopper had a habit of sneaking up to Jack's room, to look through the keyhole, on such occasions as he sent the lad to his apartment for punishment, and the crabbed old man might, even now, have discovered the absence of his ward.

"Didn't he tell you to stay in your room?" went on Miss Klopper.

"He did, but I don't want to. It's too nice out," and Jack took in deep breaths of the air, laden with the sweet scent of roses.

"You must go back at once," went on the spinster.

"I'm not going to," replied Jack. "I'm going to have a good time for once in my life."

"I shall tell my brother of your insubordinate conduct."

"I don't care," fired back Jack, as he hurried on.

"What have you in that bundle?" demanded Miss Klopper, as she saw the package the youth carried.

"Something of my own."

"I demand to know what it is!"

"And I'm not going to tell you. It's mine, and I have a perfect right to do as I please with my own things. Suffering cats!" exclaimed Jack softly. "I wish dad and mom was home," and, not caring to have any further discussion with Miss Klopper, he passed on, before she would have a chance to summon the professor.

Jack was a good boy at heart, and he never would do a mean act, but the professor and his sister had treated him so harshly, though perhaps they did not appreciate it, that his spirit rose in rebellion.

Life at the professor's house was becoming intolerable for Jack. How he wished his parents would come home. Yet it seemed now, with no news arriving from them, that it would be several months more before he could hope to be released from the guardianship of Mr. Klopper.

Jack made all haste to the town, from which the professor's house was distant about a mile. He wanted to find Tom, and dispose of the glove in time to see the show from the start. He knew

Tom would buy the mitt, for he had often expressed a wish to purchase it, and Tom usually had plenty of spending money.

Passing through the village streets Jack met several boys he knew.

"Going to the show?" was the question nearly every one of them asked of him.

"Sure," he replied, as though he had several dollars in his pockets, with which to buy tickets. "I'll meet you there. Seen Tom Berwick?" he went on.

"Yep. He's down in Newton's drug store buying sodas."

Jack turned his steps thither, and met Tom coming from the place. Tom was wiping his mouth in a suggestive manner.

"Why didn't you see me a minute sooner?" he asked. "I'd have bought you a soda," for Tom was a most generous lad.

"Wish you had," replied Jack. "Say, Tom, want to buy my catching glove?"

"What's the matter with it?" asked Tom quickly, for he had several times before offered to purchase the big mitt, only to be met with a refusal. "Ain't it any good?"

"Sure, it's good!"

"Then what you want to sell for?"

"Well, I'm going to play short this season, and I don't need a catching glove. It's a dandy. Look

at it," and Jack handed it to Tom, having taken off the paper wrapping when he was out of sight of the professor's house.

"It's all right," acknowledged Tom, after a critical inspection. "How much?"

"Give me two dollars?"

Jack had his own ideas about finance.

"Go on. I will not."

"It cost seven."

"Yes; two seasons ago. I can get a new one for three dollars."

"Not like that."

"Well, maybe not, but good enough."

"I'll let you have it for a dollar and a half," went on Jack. "That's cheap enough."

"Give you a dollar," replied Tom quickly, who knew how to bargain.

"All right," and Jack sighed a little. He had hoped to get enough to put aside some cash for future emergencies.

Tom passed over the dollar. Then he tried on the glove. It certainly was a good one.

"Come on in and I'll treat you to a soda," he proposed generously, for he decided that he had obtained a bargain, and could afford to treat.

"Going to the show?" asked Tom, as the two came out of the drug store.

"Sure. That's what I sold the glove for."

"What's the matter? Don't your dad send you any money?"

"Yes, he left some for me, but it's like pulling teeth to get it from old Klopper. He wouldn't give me even fifty cents to-night, and he sent me to my room. But I sneaked out, and I'm going to have some fun."

"That's the way to talk! He's a regular hard-shell, ain't he?"

"I should say yes! But come on, or maybe we won't get a good seat."

"Oh, I got my ticket," replied Tom. "Besides, I want to take this glove home. I'll see you there."

Jack hastened to the town auditorium, where, occasionally, traveling theatrical shows played a one-night stand. There was quite a throng in front of the box office, and Jack was afraid he would not get a seat, but he managed to secure one well down in front.

The auditorium began to fill up rapidly. Jack saw many of his chums, and nodded to them. Then he began to study the program. An announcement on it caught his eye. It was to the effect that during the entertainment a chance would be given to any amateur performers in the audience to come upon the stage, and show what they could do in the way of singing, dancing or in other lines of public entertaining. Prizes would

be given for the best act, it was stated; five dollars for the first, three for the second, and one for the third.

"Say," Jack whispered to Tom, who came in just then, "going to try for any of those prizes?"

"Naw," replied Tom, vigorously chewing gum. "I can't do nothin'. Some of the fellows are, though. Arthur Little is going to recite, and Sam Parsons is going to do some contortions. Why, do you want to try?"

"I'd like to."

"What can you do?"

"My clown act," replied Tom. "I've got some new dancing steps, and maybe I could win a prize."

"Sure you could," replied Tom generously. "Go ahead. I'll clap real loud for you."

"Guess I will," said Jack, breathing a little faster under the exciting thought of appearing on a real stage. He had often taken the part of a clown in shows the boys arranged among themselves, but this would be different.

"Ah, there goes the curtain!" exclaimed Tom, as the orchestra finished playing the introduction, and there was a murmur all over the auditorium, as the first number of the vaudeville performance started.

CHAPTER III

JACK IS PUNISHED

THE show was a fairly good one, and Jack and the other boys, as well as older persons in the audience, enjoyed the various numbers, from the singing and dancing, to a one-act sketch.

More than one was anxious, however, for the time to come when the amateurs would be given a chance. At length the manager came before the curtain, and announced that those who wished might try their talents on the audience.

Several of the boys began to call for this or that chum, whom they knew could do some specialty.

"Give us that whistling stunt, Jimmy!" was one cry.

"Hey, Sim; here's a chance to show how far you can jump!" cried another.

"Speak about the boy on the burning deck!" suggested a third.

"Now we must have quietness," declared the manager. "Those who wish to perform may come up here, give me their names, and I will announce them in turn."

Several lads started for the stage, Jack included. His chums called good-naturedly after him as he walked up the aisle.

"I might as well have all the fun I can to-night," thought our hero. "When Professor Klopper finds out what I've done, if he hasn't already, he'll be as mad as two hornets."

The boys, and one or two girls, who had stage aspirations, crowded around the manager, eager to give in their names.

"Now, one at a time, please," advised the theatrical man. "You'll each be given a chance. I may add," he went on, turning to the audience, "that the prizes will be awarded by a popular vote, as manifested by applause. The performer getting the most applause will be considered to have won the five dollars, and so with the other two prizes."

The amateurs began. Some of them did very well, while others only made laughing stocks of themselves. One of the girls did remarkably well in reciting a scene from Shakespeare.

At last it came Jack's turn. He was a little nervous as he faced the footlights, and saw such a large crowd before him. A thousand eyes seemed focused on him. But he calmed himself with the thought that it was no worse than doing as he had often done when taking part in shows that he and his chums arranged.

While waiting for his turn Jack had made an appeal to the property man of the auditorium, whom he knew quite well. The man, on Jack's request, had provided the lad with some white and red face paint, and Jack had hurriedly made up as much like a clown as possible, using one of the dressing rooms back of the stage for this purpose. So, when it came his turn to go out, his appearance was greeted with a burst of applause. He was the first amateur to "make up."

Jack was, naturally, a rather droll lad, and he was quite nimble on his feet. He had once been much impressed by what a clown did in a small circus, and he had practiced on variations of that entertainer's act, until he had a rather queer mixture of songs, jokes, nimble dancing and acrobatic steps.

This he now essayed, with such good effect that he soon had the audience laughing, and, once that is accomplished, the rest is comparatively easy for this class of work on the stage.

Jack did his best. He went through a lot of queer evolutions, leaped and danced as if his feet were on springs, and ended with an odd little verse and a backward summersault, which brought him considerable applause.

"Jack'll get first prize," remarked Tom Berwick to his chums, when they had done applauding their friend.

But he did not. The performer after him, a young lady, who had undoubted talent, by her manner of singing comic songs, to the accompaniment of the orchestra, was adjudged to have won first prize. Jack got second, and he was almost as well pleased, for the young lady, Miss Mabel Fordworth, was quite a friend of his.

"Well," thought Jack, as the manager handed him the three dollars, "here is where I have spending money for a week, anyhow. I won't have to see the boys turning up their noses because I don't treat."

The amateur efforts closed the performance, and, after Jack had washed off the white and red paint, he joined his chums.

"Say, Jack," remarked Tom, "I didn't know you could do as well as that."

"I didn't, either," replied Jack. "It was easy after I got my wind. But I was a bit frightened at first."

"I'd like to be on the stage," observed Tom, with something of a sigh. "But I can't do anything except catch balls. I don't s'pose that would take; would it?"

"It might," replied Jack good-naturedly.

"Well, come on, let's get some sodas," proposed Tom. "It was hot in there. I'll stand treat."

"Seems to me you're always standing treat,"

spoke Jack, quickly. "I guess it's my turn, fellows."

"Jack's spending some of his prize money," remarked Charlie Andrews.

"It's the first I have had to spend in quite a while," was his answer. "Old Klopper holds me down as close as if he was a miser. I'll be glad when my dad comes back."

"Where is he now?" asked Tom.

"Somewhere in China. We can't find out exactly. I'm getting a bit worried."

"Oh, I guess he's all right," observed Charlie. "But if you're going to stand treat, come on; I'm dry."

The boys were soon enjoying the sodas, and Jack was glad that he had the chance to play host, for it galled him to have to accept the hospitality of his chums, and not do his share. Now, thanks to his abilities as a clown, he was able to repay the favors.

"Well, I suppose I might as well go in the front door as to crawl in the window," thought Jack, as he neared the professor's house. "He knows I'm out, for that old maid told him, and he'll be waiting for me. I'm in for a lecture, and the sooner it's over the better. Oh, dear, but I wish dad and mom were home!"

"Well, young man, give an account of yourself," said the professor sharply, when Jack came

in. Mr. Klopper could never forget that he had been a teacher, and a severe one at that. His manner always savored of the classroom, especially when about to administer a rebuke.

"I went to the show," said Jack shortly. "I told you I was going."

"In other words you defied and disobeyed me."

"I felt that I had a right to go. I'm not a baby."

"That is no excuse. I shall report your conduct to your parents. Now another matter. Where did you get the money to go with?"

"I—I got it."

"Evidently; but I asked you where. The idea of wasting fifty cents for a silly show! Did you stop to realize that fifty cents would pay the interest on ten dollars for a year, at five per cent?"

"I didn't stop to figure it out, professor."

"Of course not. Nor did you stop to think that for fifty cents you might have bought some useful book. And you did not stop to consider that you were disobeying me. I shall attend to your case. Do you still refuse to tell me where you got that money?"

"I—I'd rather not."

"Very well, I shall make some inquiries. You may retire now. I never make up my mind when I am the least bit angry, and I find myself somewhat displeased with you at this moment."

"Displeased" was a mild way of putting it, Jack thought.

"I shall see you in the morning," went on the professor. "It is Saturday, and there is no school. Remain in your room until I come up. I wish to have a serious talk with you."

Jack had no relish for this. It would not be the first time the professor had had a "serious talk" with him, for, of late, the old teacher was getting more and more strict in his treatment of the boy. Jack was sure his father would not approve of the professor's method. But Mr. Allen was far away, and his son was not likely to see him for some time.

But, in spite of what he knew was in store for him the next morning, Jack slept well, for he was a healthy youth.

"I suppose he'll punish me in some way," he said, as he arose, "but he won't dare do very much, though he's been pretty stiff of late."

The professor was "pretty stiff" when he came to Jack's room to remonstrate with his ward on what he had done. Jack never remembered such a lecture as he got that day. Then the former college instructor ended up with:

"And, as a punishment, you will keep to your room to-day and to-morrow. I forbid you to stir from it, and if I find you trying to sneak out, as

you did last night, I shall take stringent measures to prevent you."

The professor was a powerful man, and there was more than one story of the corporal punishment he had inflicted on rebellious students.

"But, professor," said Jack. "I was going to have a practice game of baseball with the boys to-day. The season opens next week, and I'm playing in a new position. I'll have to practice!"

"You will remain in your room all of to-day and to-morrow," was all the reply the professor made, as he strode from Jack's apartment.

CHAPTER IV

DISQUIETING NEWS

"WELL, if this ain't the meanest thing he's done to me yet!" exclaimed Jack, as the door closed on the retreating form of his crusty guardian. "This is the limit! The boys expect me to the ball game, and I can't get there. That means they'll put somebody else in my place, and maybe I'll have to be a substitute for the rest of the season. I've a good notion——"

But so many daring thoughts came into Jack's mind that he did not know which one to give utterance to first.

"I'll not stand it," he declared. "He hasn't any right to punish me like this, for what I did. He had no right to keep me in. I'll get out the same way I did before."

Jack looked from the window of his room. Below it, seated on a bench, in the shade of a tree, was the professor, reading a large book.

"That way's blocked," remarked the boy. "He'll stay there all day, working out problems

about how much a dollar will amount to if put out at interest for a thousand years, or else figuring how long it will take a man to get to Mars if he traveled at the rate of a thousand miles a minute, though what in the world good such knowledge is I can't see.

"But I can't get out while he's on guard, for he wouldn't hesitate to wallop me. And when he comes in to breakfast his sister will relieve him. I am certainly up against it!

"Hold on, though! Maybe he forgot to bolt the door!"

It was a vain hope. Though Jack had not heard him do it, the professor had softly slid the bolt across as he went out of the boy's room, and our hero was practically a prisoner in his own apartment.

And this on a beautiful Saturday, when there was no school and when the first practice baseball game of the season was to be played. Is it any wonder that Jack was indignant?

"It's about time they brought me something to eat," he thought, as he heard a clock somewhere in the house strike nine. "I'm getting hungry."

He had little fear on the score that the professor would starve him, for the old college instructor was not quite as mean as that, and, in a short time, Miss Klopper appeared with a tray containing Jack's breakfast.

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself," she said. "The idea of repaying my brother's kindness by such acts! You are a wicked boy!"

Jack wondered where any special kindness on the part of the professor came in, but he did not say anything to the old maid whose temper was even more sour than her brother's. Since his parents had left him with the professor, Jack had never been treated with real kindness. Perhaps Mr. Klopper did not intend to be mean, but he was such a deep student that all who did not devote most of their time to study and research earned his profound contempt. While Jack was a good boy, and a fairly good student, he liked sports and fun, and these the professor detested. So, when he found that his ward did not intend to apply himself closely to his books, Professor Klopper began "putting the screws on," as Jack termed it.

Matters had gone from bad to worse, until the boy was now in a really desperate state. His naturally good temper had been spoiled by a series of petty fault-findings, and he had been so hedged about by the professor and his sister that he was ripe for almost anything.

All that day he remained in his room, becoming more and more angry at his imprisonment as the hours passed.

"The boys are on the diamond now," he said, as he heard a clock strike three. "They're practicing, and soon the game will start. Gee, but I wish I was there! But it's no use."

Another try at the door, and a look out of his window convinced him of this. The professor was still on guard, reading his big book.

Toward dusk the professor went in, as he could see no longer. But, by that time Jack had lost all desire to escape. He resolved to go to bed, to make the time pass more quickly, though he knew he had another day of imprisonment before him. Sunday was the occasion for long rambles in the woods and fields with his chums, but he knew he would have to forego that pleasure now. He almost hoped it would rain.

As he was undressing there came a hurried knock on his door.

"What is it?" he asked.

"My brother wants to see you at once, in his study," said Miss Klopper.

"Oh, dear," thought Jack. "Here's for another lecture."

There was no choice but to obey, however, for Mr. Allen in his last injunction to his son, had urged him to give every heed to his guardian's requests.

He found the professor in his study, with open books piled all about on a table before which he

sat. In his hand Mr. Klopper held a white slip of paper.

"Jack," he said, more kindly than he had spoken since the trouble between them, "I have here a telegram concerning your father and mother."

"Is it—is it bad news?" asked the boy quickly, for something in the professor's tone and manner indicated it.

"Well, I—er—I'm sorry to say it is not good news. It is rather disquieting. You remember I told you I cabled to the United States Consul in Hong Kong concerning your parents, when several days went by without either of us hearing from them."

"What does he say?"

"His cablegram states that your parents went on an excursion outside of Hong Kong about two weeks ago, and no word has been received from them since."

"Are they—are they killed?"

"No; I do not think so. The consul adds that as there have been disturbances in China, it is very likely that Mr. and Mrs. Allen, together with some other Americans, have been detained in a friendly province, until the trouble is over. I thought you had better know this."

"Do you suppose there is any danger?"

"I do not think so. There is no use worrying, though I was a little anxious when I had no word

from them. We will hope for the best. I will cable the consul to send me word as soon as he has any additional news."

"Poor mother!" said Jack. "She's nervous, and if she gets frightened it may have a bad effect on her heart."

"Um," remarked the professor. He had little sympathy for ailing women. "In view of this news I have decided to mitigate your punishment," he added to Jack. "You may consider yourself at liberty to-morrow, though I shall expect you to spend at least three hours in reading some good and helpful book. I will pick one out for you. It is well to train our minds to deep reading, for there is so much of the frivolous in life now-a-days, that the young are very likely to form improper thinking habits. I would recommend that you spend an hour before you retire to-night, in improving yourself in Latin. Your conjugation of verbs was very weak the last time I examined you."

"I—I don't think I could study to-night," said Jack, who felt quite miserable with his enforced detention in the house, and the unpleasant news concerning his parents. "I'd be thinking so much about my father and mother that I couldn't keep my attention on the verbs," he said.

"That indicates a weak intellect," returned the professor. "You should labor to overcome it.

However, perhaps it would be useless to have you do any Latin to-night. But I must insist on you improving in your studies. Your last report from the academy was very poor."

Jack did not answer. With a heavy heart he went to his room, where he sat for some time in the dark, thinking of his parents in far-off China.

"I wish I could go and find them," he said. "Maybe they need help. I wonder if the professor'd let me go?"

But, even as that idea came to him, he knew it would be useless to propose it to Mr. Klopper.

"He's got enough of money that dad left for my keep, to pay my passage," the boy mused on. "But if I asked for some for a steamship ticket he'd begin to figure what the interest on it for a hundred years would be, and then he'd lecture me about being a spendthrift. No, I'll have to let it go, though I do wish I could make a trip abroad. If I could only earn money enough, some way, I'd go to China and find dad and mom."

But even disquieting and sad thoughts can not long keep awake a healthy lad, and soon Jack was slumbering. He was up early the next morning, and, as usual, accompanied the professor to church.

The best part of the afternoon he was forced to spend in reading a book on what boys ought to do, written by an old man who, if ever he was a healthy, sport-loving lad, must have been one so

many years ago that he forgot that he ever liked to have fun once in a while.

Jack was glad when night came, so he could go to bed again.

"To-morrow I'll see the boys," he thought to himself. "They'll want to know why I didn't come to play ball, and I'll have to tell them the real reason. I'm getting so I hate Professor Klopper!"

If Jack had known what was to happen the next day, he probably would not have slept so soundly.

CHAPTER V

A SERIOUS ACCUSATION

"HEY, Jack, where were you Saturday?" asked Tom Berwick, as our hero came into the school yard Monday morning. "We had a dandy game," he went on. "Your catching glove is nifty!"

"Yes, Fred Walton played short," added Sam Morton. "We waited as long as we could for you. What was the matter?"

"The professor made me stay home because I skipped out the night before to go to the show."

"Say, he's a mean old codger," was Tom's opinion, which was echoed by several other lads.

"Is Fred going to play shortstop regularly?" asked Jack, of Tom Berwick, who was captain of the Academy nine.

"I don't know. He wants to, but I'd like to have you play there, Jack. Still, if you can't come Saturdays——"

"Oh, I'll come next Saturday all right. Can't we have a little practice this afternoon?"

"Sure. You can play then, if you want to. Fred has to go away, he said."

The boys had a lively impromptu contest on the diamond when school closed that afternoon, and Jack proved himself an efficient player at short-stop. It was getting dusk when he reached the professor's house, and the doughty old college instructor was waiting for him.

"Did I not tell you to come home early, in order that I might test you in algebra?" he asked Jack.

"Yes, sir. But I forgot about it," which was the truth for, in the excitement over the game, Jack had no mind for anything but baseball.

"Where were you?" went on Mr. Klopper.

"Playing ball."

"Playing ball! An idle, frivolous amusement. It tends to no good, and does positive harm. I have no sympathy with that game. It gives no time for reflection. I once watched a game at the college where I used to teach. I saw several men standing at quite some distance from the bare spot where one man was throwing a ball at another, with a stick in his hand."

"That was the diamond," volunteered Jack, hoping the professor might get interested in hearing about the game, and so forego the lecture that was in prospect.

"Ah, a very inappropriate name. Such an utterly valueless game should not be designated by

any such expensive stone as a diamond. But what I was going to say was that I saw some of the players standing quite some distance from the bare spot——"

"They were in the outfield, professor. Right field, left field and centre."

"One moment; I care nothing about the names of the contestants. I was about to remark that those distant players seemed to have little to do with the game. They might, most profitably have had a book with them, to study while they were standing there, but they did not. Instead they remained idle—wasting their time."

"But they might have had to catch a ball any moment."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the professor. "It is an idle frivolous amusement, and I regret very much that you wasted your valuable time over it. After supper I want to hear you read some Virgil, and also do some problems in geometry. I was instructed by your father to see that your education was not neglected, and I must do my duty, no matter how disagreeable it is."

Jack sighed. He had studied hard in class that day, and now to be made to put in the evening over his books he thought was very unfair.

But there was no escape from the professor, and the boy had to put in two hours at his Latin and mathematics, which studies, though they un-

doubtedly did him good, were very distasteful to him.

"You are making scarcely any progress," said the professor, when Jack had failed to properly answer several of his questions. "I want you to come home early from school to-morrow afternoon, and I will give you my undivided attention until bedtime. I am determined that you shall learn."

Jack said nothing, but he did not think it would be wise to go off playing ball the next afternoon, though the boys urged him strongly.

"Why don't you write and tell your dad how mean old Klopper is treating you?" suggested Tom, when Jack explained the reason for going straight home from his classes.

"I would if I knew how to reach him. But I don't know where he is," and Jack sighed, for he was becoming more and more alarmed at the long delay in hearing from his father.

But Jack was destined to do no studying that afternoon under the watchful eye of Professor Klopper. He had no sooner entered the house than he was made aware that something unusual had happened.

"My brother is waiting for you in the library," said Miss Klopper, and Jack noticed that she was excited over something.

"Maybe it's bad news about the folks," the boy

thought, but when he saw that the professor had no cablegram, he decided it could not be that.

"Jack," began the aged teacher, "I have a very serious matter to speak about."

"I wonder what's coming now?" thought the boy.

"Do you recall the night you disobeyed me, and, sneaking out of your window like a thief, you went to a—er—a theatrical performance without my permission?" asked the professor.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, wondering if his guardian thought he was likely to forget it so soon.

"Do you also recollect me asking you where you got the money wherewith to go?"

"Yes, sir."

"I now, once more, demand that you tell me where you obtained it, and, let me warn you that it is serious. I insist that you answer me. Where did you get that money?"

"I—I don't want to tell you, Professor Klopper."

"Are you afraid?"

"No, sir," came the indignant answer, for there were few things of which Jack Allen was afraid.

"Then why don't you tell me?"

"Because I don't think you have a right to know everything that I do. I am not a baby. I assure you I got that money in a perfectly legitimate way."

"Oh, you did?" sneered the professor. "We shall see about that. Come in," he called, and, to Jack's surprise the door opened and Miss Klopper entered the library.

"I believe you have something to say on a subject that interests all present," went on the professor, in icy tones.

"She knows nothing of where I got the money," said Jack.

"We shall see," remarked Mr. Klopper. "You may tell what you know," he added to his sister.

"I saw Jack just as he got down out of his window," Miss Klopper stated, as if she was reciting a lesson. "He had a bundle with him. I asked what it was and he would not tell me."

"Is that correct?" inquired the former teacher.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, wondering how the professor could be interested in his catching glove, which was what the bundle had contained.

"What was in that package?" went on the professor.

"I—I don't care to tell, sir."

"I insist that you shall. Once again, I warn you that it is a very serious matter."

Jack could not quite understand why, so he kept silent.

"Well, are you going to tell me?"

"No, sir."

Jack had no particular reason for not telling,

but he had made up his mind that the professor had no right to know, and he was not going to give in to him.

"This is your last chance," warned his guardian. "Are you going to tell me?"

"No, sir."

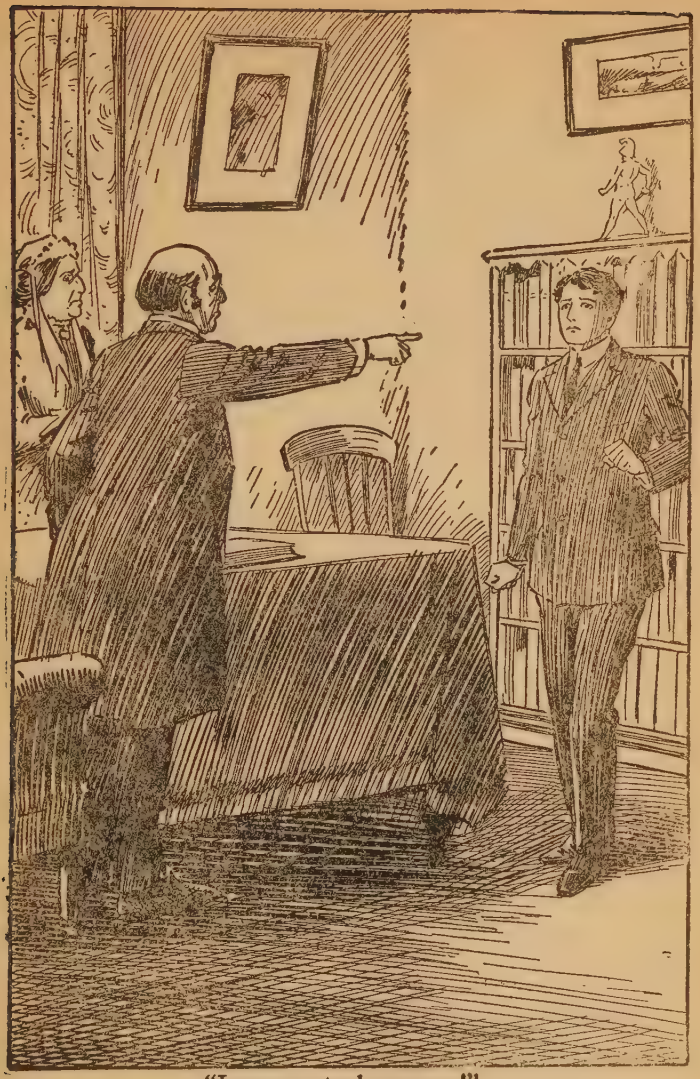
"Then I will tell you what was in that package. It was my gold loving cup, that the teachers of Underhill College presented to me on the occasion of my retirement from the faculty of that institution!"

"Your loving cup?" repeated Jack in amazement, for that cup was one of the professor's choicest possessions, and quite valuable.

"Yes, my loving cup. You had it in that bundle, and you took it out to pawn it, in order to get money to go to that show."

"That's not true!" cried Jack indignantly. "All I had in that bundle was my catching glove, which I sold to Tom Berwick."

"I don't believe you," said the professor stiffly. "I say you stole my loving cup and pawned it. The cup is gone from its accustomed place on my dresser. I did not miss it until this afternoon, and, when I asked my sister about it, she said she had not seen it. Then she recalled your sneaking away from the house with a bundle, and I at once knew what had become of it."



"I say you took my cup!"

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"You couldn't know, for there is absolutely no truth in this accusation," replied Jack hotly.

"Do you mean to say that I am telling an untruth?" asked the professor sharply. "I say that you took my cup."

"And I say that I didn't! I never touched your cup! If it's gone some one else took it!"

Jack spoke in loud and excited tones.

"Don't you dare contradict me, young man!" thundered the former teacher. "I will not permit it. I say you took that cup! I know you did!"

"I didn't!" cried Jack.

The professor was so angry that he took a step toward the lad. He raised his hand, probably unconsciously, as though to deal Jack a box on the ear, for this was the old teacher's favorite method of correcting a refractory student.

Jack, with the instinct of a lad who will assume a defensive attitude on the first sign of an attack, doubled up his fists.

"What! You dare attempt to strike me?" cried the professor. "You dare?"

"I'm not going to have you hit me," murmured Jack. "You are making an unjust charge. I never took that cup. I can prove what I had in that package by Tom Berwick."

"I do not believe you," went on the professor. "I know you pawned that cup to get spending

money, because I refused to give you any to waste. I will give you a chance to confess, and tell me where you disposed of it, before I take harsh measures."

Jack started. What did the professor mean by harsh measures?

"I can't confess what I did not do," he said, more quietly. "I never took the loving cup."

"And I say you did!" cried the old teacher, seeming to lose control of himself. "I say you stole it, and I'll have you arrested, you young rascal! Go to your room at once, and remain there until I get an officer. We'll see then whether you'll confess or not. I'll call in a policeman at once. See that he does not leave the house," he added to his sister, as he hurried from the room.

Jack started from the library.

"Where are you going?" asked Miss Klopper, placing herself in his path. She was a large woman, and strong.

"I am going to my room," replied Jack, sore at heart and very miserable over the unjust accusation.

CHAPTER VI

JACK RUNS AWAY

JACK closed the door of his apartment and sat down in a chair by the bed. His mind was in a whirl. He wondered if the professor would carry out his threat, and call an officer.

"He's mean enough to," thought the boy. "But I don't see how he can accuse me of taking that cup. I know he values it very highly, and feels very badly over its loss, if it is gone, but I had nothing to do with it. I can easily prove, by Tom Berwick, that it was a glove I had in the bundle."

Then another thought came to Jack. He remembered that, after getting out of sight of the house, he had thrown away the paper from the catching glove. All Tom could say was that his chum had sold him a glove. Tom would know nothing about any bundle that Jack had carried away from the professor's house.

"I may have hard work proving that I only took the glove with me," mused Jack. "The professor is so quick tempered that he'll not believe such

proof as I can bring forward. It looks as if I was in a hole."

The more Jack thought it over the less inclined he was to await the return of the professor with an officer.

"I'll not submit to the disgrace of an arrest, even though I know I am innocent," he declared. "That's carrying things too far. If dad was only here——"

He stopped suddenly, and a lump came into his throat, while there was suspicious moisture in his eyes.

"This is the limit!" the boy exclaimed, at length. "I'm not going to stand it! I'll skip out! I'll run away! I'll go anywhere rather than stay in this house any longer!

"Whatever happens to me, or wherever I go I can't be much worse off than I have been here, with old Klopper and his sister. I've got a little money left, and I guess I can get work somewhere. I'll pack up my clothes and leave. Dad wouldn't blame me, if he knew. Neither would mother. I'll go; that's what I'll do!"

Once he had formed this resolution Jack set about ways and means. First he looked to see how much money he had.

"Two dollars and fifteen cents," he said, as he counted the change. "Not an awful lot, but I'll have to make it do. I wish there was another

show coming to town. Maybe I could make a little money doing my clown stunt on amateur night. But I haven't any time to wait for such a thing as that. I've got to get out at once."

Next he began to consider what he had better take with him. He had several suits of clothes, and a plentiful supply of other garments. Selecting the best he placed them in his dress suit case.

"Now to get away," he murmured. "The professor will have to go to town for an officer, and he can't get back inside a half hour. I've got about fifteen minutes left. Guess I'd better go by the window. That old cat of a sister of his will probably be on the watch downstairs if I go out the door."

Jack gave a last look around the room that had been his for the past year. There were no very pleasant memories connected with it. He saw his school books lying on a shelf.

"I won't need you, where I'm going," he said. "The term is almost closed. By the time I get ready to come back, or hear from my folks I can start a new term, but I hope I'll never have anything more to do with Professor Klopper."

Jack went to the window to look out, to see if it would be safe to drop the suit-case, and then follow himself. To his surprise, coming over the back path, which he often used as a short cut to the village, he saw the professor and a policeman.

"It's too late!" he exclaimed. "He took the short way home, and got here quicker than I thought he would. He kept his threat, and is going to have me arrested. What'll I do?"

Jack thought rapidly. He had made up his mind that he would not submit to the indignity of being taken into custody, even though he thought he could, after some trouble, prove his innocence of the charge.

"I'm not going to let them get me," said Jack softly. "What had I better do? I know. I'll hide in the big attic closet. He'll never think to look for me there. But, before I go I'll just make them think I got away out of the window. Then they won't spend so much time looking for me."

Jack took a piece of rope, one of the many things in his room which he had stowed away, thinking he might some day find a use for it. He tied one end to his bed, and threw the other out of the window, taking care that the approaching professor and the officer should not see him.

"There, they'll think I got down by that," he said, "though I never use it. The lightning rod is good enough for me. Now to hide!"

Softly opening his door, which, fortunately was not bolted, and carrying his dress-suit case, he went up to the big attic, which took up the entire third story of the professor's house. There was a roomy closet, or store room in it, and, selecting a place be-

hind a large chest, Jack sat down there, stowing his case away out of sight.

"I don't believe they'll find me here," he said, with a smile. "Gee, but I'm glad I decided to skip out! I couldn't stand it any longer!"

He listened intently, and soon he heard his name being called by the professor.

"They've found out I'm not in my room," he said. "Well, let 'em hunt."

He heard his name being shouted again.

"That's Miss Klopper," he remarked. "I've fooled 'em."

Then he heard confused sounds throughout the house, and he knew they were searching for him. But he had selected his hiding place well. Besides, the dangling rope did deceive the professor and the policeman.

"The rascal has gotten away," said Mr. Klopper, when a superficial search of the house failed to reveal the boy. "I did not think he would do that."

"Most any boy would, under the circumstances," observed the policeman grimly. "You shouldn't have told him you were going to have him arrested. If you'd come away quietly and got me we would have him now."

"I'll get him yet," declared the professor savagely. "I will compel him to tell me where he pawned my gold loving cup. I shall also cable to

his father of what he has done, as soon as I get his address. I never supposed, after all my teaching, that Jack would prove such a rascal."

"Maybe he didn't take the cup," suggested the officer.

"I know he did," insisted the former teacher, as if that settled it.

Meanwhile, Jack remained in hiding. He heard the house grow more quiet after the officer took his departure. The professor had given up the search, though he had asked the authorities to send out a general alarm for the runaway boy.

"It must be quite dark outside by now," thought Jack, after an hour or more behind the big chest. "I wonder if it's safe to venture downstairs? I'm almost starved, for I didn't have any supper. Guess I'd better wait a while. The professor and his sister go to bed early, and they're sound sleepers. Then I'll sneak out and get something from the pantry."

He waited another hour. Then, taking off his shoes, and carrying them in one hand, while in the other he carried the dress-suit case, he stole down the attic stairs.

He listened intently. There was not a sound. The house was dark, and, as he stood there, anxiously waiting, he heard a clock strike ten.

"They're asleep," he said softly. "Now for something to eat."

He made his way to the pantry. He struck a match, one of a supply he always carried, and found a piece of candle. This he lighted, and, by its flickering glow, he made a meal from cold victuals which were on the shelves.

"Guess I'll take a little lunch with me," he remarked softly. "It may come in handy."

He did up some bread and meat, a bit of cake, and a piece of pie in a paper, which he thrust into his pocket. Then, having put on his shoes, and grasping his case, he let himself out of the front door.

"Well, I've run away," he remarked grimly, as he looked back at the dark and silent house. "Now for a free life, without being scolded every minute by old Klopper. I've got the whole world before me, and I shouldn't care if I never came back, if I could only get to where dad and mom are."

Poor Jack! he little realized what was in store for him before he would see his parents again.

CHAPTER VII

A NARROW ESCAPE

WITH the one thought firm in his mind, to get safely away from the house, Jack gave little heed which way he went. Naturally he headed away from the village, for he knew, late as it was, nearly midnight now, some one would be about who might know him.

"I've got to keep out of sight for a while," thought the boy. "If I guess right, the professor will be so mad because I have run away that he'll have the police in all the nearby places on the look-out for me. Nearly every officer in Westville knows me, so I don't want to meet any of them."

He walked on, keeping in the shadows, until he was about a mile from the house, having traveled in an opposite direction to that in which the village was situated.

"I'd better make out a plan of campaign, the way Cæsar did," he said. "Queer I should think of that old warrior, when I hate Latin so, but then

he knew a good deal about battles, though I don't remember that he ever ran away much.

"Let's see," he went on musingly. "If I go this way I'll reach Cloverdale in about an hour. They have a regular uniformed force there, and probably they've been warned by telephone to look out for a boy with a dress-suit case. If I bear off to the left I'll get to Pendleton in two hours. There are only a couple of constables there, and I don't believe they'll be on the watch for me. From Pendleton I can take a train to some other place."

Jack thought matters over a little more. He wanted to be sure and make no mistake, as this was a very important period in his life. He recalled several stories he had read of boys running away, but none of them seemed to fit his case.

"The trouble is, I don't know just where to go," he thought. "I don't want to go to sea, I don't care about going out west to fight Indians or dig for gold, and there's no special kind of work I can do. The only thing I would like to do would be to find my folks. Maybe I can, some time, though when I'll have money enough to go to China I'm sure I don't know. I wonder where I'd better go after I get to Pendleton?"

Jack thought hard. It was quite a problem for the lad. There were so many things to consider. First of all, of course, was to keep out of the clutches of a policeman.

"I think I'll go to Rudford," he announced to himself. "That's quite a town, and it's far enough off so that the professor will not think of telephoning to it. It will take almost all my money to get there, but when I arrive I'll have a better chance to get a job than I would have in these small towns. I'll go to Rudford. There's a train from Pendleton to Rudford about three o'clock. I can just make it."

Off he trudged once more, proceeding faster, now that he had a definite plan before him. It was rather lonesome, walking along the deserted country road at night, but Jack had no fears. The worst he could meet with would be tramps, and he did not worry about them.

Still, as he came to a stretch where the road ran through a rather dense patch of woods, he was a little nervous, especially when he heard something stirring in the forest close to the highway. He stood still, and he could feel his heart pounding against his ribs.

"Maybe that's a crowd of tramps," he thought, for, of late, several members of that road fraternity had been committing petty depredations in the vicinity.

The rustling in the woods became louder. It seemed as if some one was running toward the road, snapping the branches underfoot.

Then, from the darkness of the woods, two

bright eyes peered out at Jack, reflecting in the light of the new moon. They showed red and green.

"An animal," said the lad to himself, with a sigh of relief. "A fox, most likely."

Then a distant owl hooted, and the fox, if such the beast was, disappeared like a flash.

"I might have known it," thought Jack, but, nevertheless, it was some time before his heart beat regularly. At length he saw a distant light, and knew that he was approaching Pendleton.

"I'll soon be there," he thought. "Then for a ride on the train, and, as soon as it's daylight, I'll look for work in Rudford. I ought to get a place easily. I'm strong for my age."

Half an hour later Jack was tramping through the silent streets of the village, on his way to the railroad station. He had been there once before, when the Academy nine played the Pendleton team, and he knew his way about.

Just as the youth was turning a dark corner, on a street which he remembered led to the depot, he heard some one coming toward him. He peered ahead, and, from the fact that the man he saw carried a long club, he concluded that the person was a constable.

"I mustn't let him see me," thought the boy. "It's just possible there's an alarm for me here.

The dresssuit case will give me away, sure. I'd better hide it until he gets past."

Fortunately, Jack was in the dense shadow cast by a building. The constable was coming directly toward him, and if he turned back, the officer would hear him. A sudden idea came to the lad.

Setting his dresssuit case down in the doorway, where it would be out of sight, Jack advanced boldly to meet the constable. The officer rather started on beholding the boy appear from out of the shadow.

"Can you please tell me the way to the railroad station?" asked Jack. "I want to get a train."

"Right down this street," replied the officer, which fact Jack knew well. "Out rather late, aren't you?" asked the officer suspiciously.

"Well, it is late," admitted Jack, as if some one had disputed it. "But I couldn't get here any sooner," which was the truth. "I'm on my way to Rudford, to work," he added. "I had to leave rather suddenly, and this is the first train I could get. There's one about three, isn't there?"

He was glad he knew something about the time-table, though it was not much.

"Three-eight," replied the officer. "You haven't seen anything of a lad with a dresssuit case, have you?"

"A lad with a dresssuit case?" repeated Jack, as though such a curiosity was not to be met with

outside of a circus. Then the alarm for him had been sent here, after all, he thought. But his natural manner fooled the constable.

"Yes," went on the officer. "We've got orders to arrest a lad with a dresssuit case. Telephone came from the police at Westville."

"What's he wanted for?"

As if Jack did not know!

"Stealing a gold cup from some professor there. I don't know much about the case. I was only told to arrest a lad with a dresssuit case, and I'm looking for him. I thought you was him, first, but you haven't any case."

"Oh, no," spoke Jack, hoping the one in the doorway would not be seen.

"I'd like to arrest him," continued the constable. "I hear there's a reward offered for him, and I'd like to get it."

Evidently, Professor Klopper must have been very much incensed over his ward's escape to offer a reward, for he was very fond of money. Jack resolved to use every means to avoid capture.

"Well, I'd better be getting on," said the officer. "If you go right down this street you'll come to the depot. You can just make the train. Generally it's a little late. If you see a lad with a suit case, tell the first constable you meet."

"I understand," answered Jack, and grinned to himself.

He walked on slowly, looking back once or twice to see if the constable was watching him. But that officer evidently had no suspicions, for he did not once peer after Jack.

When the man had gone some distance, and had turned down a side street, Jack ventured to retrace his steps and get his suit case.

"I can't leave that behind," he thought. "It's all I've got in the world now."

He reached the station without further incident, congratulating himself upon his narrow escape. Then, as he walked up the depot platform, he resolved to practice another bit of caution.

"The agent there has probably been warned to be on the lookout for me," he reasoned. "My dresssuit case seems to be the most conspicuous part of my make-up. I'll just leave it outside when I go in to buy a ticket."

He was glad he did so, for, when he asked for passage to Rudford, the agent, rousing himself from his nap, looked out of the little brass-barred window at the boy in front of him. Very evidently he was looking to see if Jack carried a suit case.

"No baggage?" he remarked, in questioning accents.

"Not so's you could notice it," replied Jack, making use of a bit of slang that served his pur-

pose well, without compelling him to make a direct statement.

He went outside, got his case, and remained in the shadow of the depot shed until the train came along.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIDE-DOOR PULLMAN

JACK fancied that the conductor, when he took up his ticket, looked suspiciously at him, but probably this was only the result of his imagination. At any rate, the runaway was glad when the train stopped at Rudford, and he could get out.

It was early morning, and rather cool, in spite of the fact that it was the last of June.

"A cup of coffee and some rolls for mine," thought Jack, as he saw a small refreshment stand in the station.

The food tasted good to him, and he decided it was wiser to spend a little of his money for it than to draw on the supply of cold victuals in his pocket.

"No telling when I'll need them," he thought, "and I want to be in good shape to look for work." Then another thought came to him. He could not very well go about looking for a job carrying his suit case. Besides, it would look suspicious, in case there was any alarm here for him. He saw a notice at the refreshment stand to the effect that

valises and small parcels would be checked at the rate of ten cents a day.

"That will suit me," decided Jack, and he handed over his large valise, receiving for it a paper check. "Now I can travel about better," he added.

Jack's one idea now was to get a place to work. He did not intend to stay permanently in Rudford, but he wanted to earn enough money to take him to some larger place, and that he needed money was very evident, when he looked over his cash and found he had less than a dollar. The railroad ticket had taken the most of his small capital.

Now, whether Jack was not exactly the sort of boy the merchants needed, or whether there was already a plentiful supply of lads already in town, or whether there were more boys than there were jobs, Jack did not stop to figure out. The fact was, however, that he tramped about all that morning, asking in a score or more of places for work, without getting it.

"Well, it isn't going to be as easy as I though it was," he said to himself. "Tramping about makes me hungry. I've got to eat. I'd better tackle the stuff I brought from the professor's house. The longer I keep that, the staler it'll get, until I won't be able to eat it after a while. There's enough for dinner and supper, and for breakfast. We'll see what turns up to-morrow."

He found a secluded spot, where he dined frugally on the bread and meat, and the piece of pie. He washed it down with some cool water from a street fountain. But, oh how he wished he could have an icecream soda!

Signs advertising the various flavors of that drink seemed to stare at him from every drug store and confectionery shop window, and, as it was warm from the sun, Jack longed for the cool beverage.

"But I can't afford it," he decided. "Five cents will get me a cup of coffee in the morning, and I'll need that more than I need a soda now."

In the afternoon he resumed his search for work, but with no success. Once, as he was passing a printing shop, he saw displayed that magical sign: *"Boy Wanted."*

"I see you want a boy," he remarked, as he went in. "I'd like to get the job."

"Can you kick a press?" asked the man, evidently favorably impressed by Jack's appearance.

"Kick a press? Why should I kick a press?"

"Oh, it's easy to see you don't know anything about the printing business," remarked the proprietor, with a smile. "I need a boy to kick a press, run one with his feet, I mean, and set up simple jobs; but it wouldn't pay me to hire one who doesn't understand the work."

"I could learn," said Jack.

"No, I haven't any time to teach you, and you'd spoil more work than you'd be worth. Sorry," and he turned back to his desk.

"I can't kick a press," thought Jack, as he went out, "but I can kick a football. Only there's no chance on the gridiron these days. Wonder if I could get a job in some theatre?"

This plan seemed good to him, as he remembered how he had been applauded that amateur night, but he was doomed to disappointment, for, on inquiring of a man, he learned there were no theatres open in Rudford.

"Well, that's the end of that," mused our hero. "I'll try a few more places for a job, though it's most closing time. I wonder where I'll sleep tonight? Running away isn't as nice and easy as I thought it was."

His search for work was unavailing. He walked along the street, feeling quite blue and lonesome, when something happened that caused a great change in his plans. This was the sight of a small type-written notice tacked on a bulletin board outside of a red brick building. The building, Jack decided, as soon as he had looked at it, was a police station.

The notice which so startled him was one offering a reward for his capture. Before he realized the danger of it, Jack had come to a halt, and was reading the statement.

A reward of fifty dollars was offered by Professor Klopper for the arrest of the runaway, who was charged with the theft of a valuable gold cup. Jack was not very accurately described, for the professor was not aware how his ward was dressed, since Jack had taken several suits with him. Police and others, however, were advised to be on the lookout for a boy with a dresssuit case.

"I wish I didn't have it," thought Jack. "But there's no help for it now. That's the only thing they'll recognize me by. But I'd better be getting out of here."

He hurried past the police station, and, just as he came opposite the entrance, an officer rushed out. He collided with the boy, and, to save them both from falling, grabbed the lad.

"I'm caught," thought Jack desperately. But it was merely an accident.

"I beg your pardon," spoke the officer, as he released Jack. "I'm hurrying to stop a fight down the street. Word about it has just been telephoned in. I didn't see you."

"No, and you won't again, if I can prevent it," thought Jack, as he hastened on, glad that the excitement over the collision had caused the officer to pass on without taking a good look at him.

"I've got to get out of town as quickly as possible," thought the startled lad. "This place isn't safe for me. I wonder where I'd better go? I

must get my suit case, and then see where I can get a ticket for."

He went back to the depot, presented his check, and received his case. As he reached his hand in his pocket to get the ten cents, he was startled to find but a single coin there. It was a dime. He paid it to the man at the refreshment booth, and then, walking to one side, began a hurried search for the rest of his cash. It was gone!

"Some one either picked my pocket, or else it was jarred out when that policeman ran into me," he said. "Lucky there was this ten cents left. Now I *am* up against it."

What was he to do? With no money, how could he get out of the town where, doubtless, every officer was on the watch for him, anxious to earn the reward? It was a serious problem.

"I mustn't hang around here," thought Jack. "They'll probably be watching the railroad stations. I've got to walk about and think a bit."

He hardly noticed where he turned his steps, but he was brought out of his unpleasant day-dream by hearing some one address him.

"What's de matter, cully?" a voice asked. "You look sort of cheesy."

Jack saw that the speaker was a tramp, but rather a good-natured looking one, and not quite so dirty and disreputable as the average. The boy also noticed, for the first time, that he was passing

along a street which bordered the railroad freight yard, and that there were long strings of cars on a track adjoining the sidewalk.

"Down on yer luck?" asked the man.

Jack nodded.

"What's de matter?" went on the tramp. "Runaway, an' sorry fer it?"

"I'm not a bit sorry," answered Jack, as he thought of the mean professor. "But I want to get out of town, and I've lost all my money."

"Oh, dat's easy," remarked the tramp, though whether he referred to losing the money or getting out of town, Jack was not quite sure.

"If you want t' make a git-away, I kin fix youse up," went on the ragged man.

"How?" asked Jack, becoming interested.

"I'll show youse how t' git inter a side-door Pullman, an' youse kin ride as fur as youse wants."

"A side-door Pullman?"

"Sure. Freight car, wid de side door; ain't youse wise to dem yet? Dat's a swell way of travelin' when youse ain't got de chink. Come on, I'll put youse next t' one. Dere's a freight bein' made up, an' dere's a lot of empties in it. Be youse particular which way youse goes?"

"No," replied Jack.

"Dat's good. I am. I want t' go west, but dere's a train bound fer de east goin' t' pull out

t'-night. I'll help youse git inter one of de side-door Pullmans on dat. Come on."

Jack followed the man, who, after a cautious look around, to make sure that there were no police or trainmen watching, led the way into the freight yard. He stopped before an empty box car, with an open door.

"In youse go," he said cheerfully, helping Jack to climb up. "Dere's yer baggage," he added. "Now youse is all right, cully. Git off whenever youse feels like it. Yer ticket's good anywhere," and, sliding the door almost shut, he walked away, leaving Jack in the car.

CHAPTER IX

JACK LOSES SOMETHING

"WELL, things are certainly happening to me," mused Jack, as he tried to find the softest board in the floor of the freight car, whereon to sit. He finally decided that his dresssuit case would make the best kind of a stool, and, turning it upon end, he sat on it, leaning back against the side of the "Pullman."

"Two days ago I would no more have thought I'd be in this position than I would of trying to fly. Yet here I am, I've run away from the professor, there's a reward for my arrest, I have just escaped in time, and now I'm bound for I don't know where. Things are certainly happening to me. Let's see; that tramp said this train was going east. I don't suppose it makes much difference to me, but I almost wish it was going west. I'd like to find out what become of my folks, and the nearer I get to California, the better chance I have of hearing news from China. I think, after I get far enough away so there's no danger of me being arrested,

I'll strike out for San Francisco. When I get there I may have a chance to work my passage to China."

This thought comforted Jack somewhat. As he sat in the dark car, going over in his mind what had happened in the last twenty-four hours, he was suddenly nearly thrown to the floor as the vehicle gave a lurch, following a loud crash. Another car had bumped into the one in which Jack was.

"They're making up the train," he said, as he heard the engine whistle. "We'll be moving pretty soon."

He went to the door and peered out of the small opening the tramp had left. He could see brakemen running to and fro in the freight yard, while men in greasy blue suits, carrying flaming torches, for it was now getting dark, made hasty examinations of the running gear and trucks of the cars, so that any breaks might be detected before the train started, while journal boxes, in which rest the wheel axles, that had not a sufficient amount of waste and oil, were filled, so that the axles would not get hot, producing what is known in railroad terms as a "hot box."

Then came more signals from the locomotive. Jack heard men shouting out orders. Next came two short, sharp blasts from the whistle.

"That means we're going to start," thought the boy, and, a moment later, with many a squeak and

shrill protest from the wheels, the freight train was under way.

Jack soon discovered that riding in a "side-door Pullman" was not very comfortable. The freight car was not as well provided with springs as even an ordinary day coach, and as it went bumping along over the rails, he was jostled about considerably.

"Guess if I got in a corner and braced myself, I could ride easier," he thought, and, carrying his suit case there, he made himself as comfortable as possible.

"This is better," he remarked to himself. "Guess I'll eat now, though I must save some food for breakfast. But what am I going to drink? I never thought of that."

There was no solution of that problem, and Jack was forced to make a very dry meal on about half of what remained of the food he had brought from the professor's pantry. In a little while he was more thirsty than before.

"I don't know how I'm going to stand it," he said ruefully. "I'll choke pretty soon. I'd ought to have brought a bottle of soda water along. I'll know better next time. I can't get out now. The train's going too fast."

The car was swaying from side to side, and to jump from it was out of the question. There was nothing to do but stand it.

"I'll get out at the first stop," thought Jack, but he did not know that he was on a through freight, which made but few stops.

Soon, in spite of his thirst, Jack felt sleepy. He was very tired, and the monotonous sound of the wheels clicking over the rail joints produced a sort of hypnotic effect. Before he knew it, he was slumbering, having slipped down from his dresssuit case, to lie at full length on the hard floor of the car, his head pillowed on the valise and his bundled-up coat.

When Jack awoke with a start, some hours later, he saw by the daylight streaming in through the partly opened door of the car, that it was morning. He got up, feeling lame and stiff, and, for a moment, he could scarcely remember where he was.

"Well," he remarked, with a grim smile, as he donned his coat, "the conductor didn't take up my ticket, and the porter hasn't blacked my shoes, but I guess I'll have to let it go. I expect I need a good brushing down, too.

"I wonder whereabouts I am," he went on. "Guess I'll take a look. I want to get off as soon as I can. My, but I'm dry! My tongue's like a piece of leather!"

He picked up his suit case and went to the side door. He caught a glimpse of green fields through which the train was moving.

Setting the case down in front of the door, Jack

put his hands in the crack, to make it wider, in order that he might see better. The door stuck a little, and he had to use considerable strength to shove it, but he finally found it was giving.

He had one glimpse of a broad sweep of pretty country, with a range of low mountains in the distance, and then something happened.

The train gave a sudden swerve as it went around a sharp curve. The abrupt change in motion nearly threw Jack from the car, but, instinctively, he clung to the edge of the door with all his strength.

Just then the train thundered over a bridge spanning a small river. The car rocked and swayed with the motion imparted to it by the curve, and then, before Jack could put out a hand to catch it, his dresssuit case toppled over and slid out of the open door, falling down into the river. Jack could see the spalsh it made, as it disappeared beneath the water, and then, as the train rolled on, the rumbling caused by passing over the bridge was changed to a duller sound, as solid ground was reached.

"My suit case!" exclaimed Jack, leaning from the door and looking back. "I can't afford to lose that! I must get it. Maybe it'll float, and perhaps the river isn't very deep. I must get out at the next stop and go back after it. But will the train stop anywhere near here?"

Anxiously he noted the speed. It did seem as if the cars were not going quite so fast now.

"If they slow up a little more, I'll risk it and jump," said the boy. "I've got to get that suit case!"

CHAPTER X

A FRUITLESS SEARCH

HOLDING fast to the edge of the door, to steady himself against the swaying of the car, which was now rumbling along over an uneven piece of track, Jack peered ahead to see if there was a station in view.

"Yet perhaps this freight doesn't stop at the regular stations," he remarked. "I'm in a pretty mess, I am. Guess I'd better take lessons in traveling in side-door Pullmans. I need a keeper, I do. Why couldn't I have left the case in the corner? Then the lurch of the car wouldn't have toppled it out. Well, it's easy enough to think that now, but that won't bring it back.

"That looks like a station just ahead there," he went on. "And I certainly think the train's slowing up. I believe I could almost jump now."

But a look at the ground directly below him showed that the car he was in was moving too rapidly to permit of a safe leap. Then came a percep-

tible slacking of the train's speed. At the same time there was a long whistle from the engine.

"That means put on brakes," reasoned Jack, who knew a little about railroads. "I believe we're going to stop. Oh, I see," he added, a moment later. "That's a water tank just ahead there, instead of a station. They've got to stop for water. I'm glad of that; I'd rather not get out near a station. Some one might want to arrest me, though I must be pretty well disguised with all the dirt I've gathered up from the floor of this car."

A little later the train came to a stop, and Jack leaped from the car and started back over the route he had come. He saw a little brook running along the railroad embankment.

"Water!" he exclaimed. "Just what I need most in the world, next to my suit case. Whew! But I'm thirsty!"

He found the water cool and good, and drank heartily. Then he washed his hands and face, and felt better. He brushed as much dirt as possible from his clothes, and then took to the track, intending to walk along it until he came to the river in which his valise had tumbled.

"I might as well make my breakfast as I go along," he reasoned, as he took from his pocket the last of his scanty supply of food. "Not very appetizing," he added, as he saw how dry and stale the bread and meat was. Of the cake, none remained,

but there was part of a very much crushed piece of pie. Still, Jack was hungry, and he wished he had more of the same kind of food.

The railroad ran for some distance along a high embankment, across a low stretch of meadow, and then it turned, bordering a country highway. Jack decided it would be easier walking on the road than along the ties, so he crossed over.

"It can't be more than a couple of miles back," he said to himself. "My things will be pretty well soaked, but I guess I can dry them out."

As he went around a bend in the road, he came to a place where another highway joined the one on which he was traveling. At the same time he saw, coming along the other road, a country lad, driving a wagon, in which were a number of milk cans. The youthful driver spied Jack.

"Want a lift?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Thanks, but it depends on which way you are going," replied our hero.

"I'm going along this road," was the answer, and the lad pointed to the highway bordering the track. "I'm taking this milk to the dairy," he added. "Ye can ride as far as I go."

"Then I guess I will. I want to get to where the railroad crosses the river, about two miles back."

"That's the Wickatunk creek; that ain't no

river," remarked the young milkman. "Goin' fishin' in it?"

"Well, yes, you might call it that."

"There ain't no fish in it, around here. About three miles down is a good place, though."

"I don't expect to catch any fish," said Jack, with a smile.

"Ye don't? Then what in Tunket be ye goin' fishin' fer?"

"My dresssuit case."

The boy, who had halted his horse, looked at Jack sharply. Evidently he thought the stranger was not quite sound in his mind.

"That's right," went on our hero, with a smile. "My suit case toppled into the river as I was riding over it in a freight car. I'm going back to see if I can't fish it out."

"Oh," remarked the other lad. "Well, come on up, and I'll drive ye there. I thought maybe ye was jokin'."

"No, it's far from being a joke. I hope I get it out. I need the clothes that are in it, though by the time I get them they may look as badly as this suit does," and he glanced down at the one he wore, which was wrinkled and dirty from his ride in the freight car.

Jack got up on the seat beside the farmer lad, and briefly told the circumstances of his loss, saying nothing, however, about having run away.

He said he was traveling in the freight car because he could not afford any other means of transportation, which was true enough.

"I'll help ye look," volunteered the boy. "I've got lots of time. I started fer th' dairy early this mornin'. Did yer satchel have anything heavy in it, so's it would sink?"

"Well, I don't know. I'm afraid it wouldn't float very well, after the clothes got water-soaked. Is the river very deep?"

" 'Tain't a river, I tell ye. It's a creek."

"It looked like a river to me, and a mighty big one, when I saw my case fall into it. Is the creek very deep?"

"Not very; only in spots. It's kinder deep where th' railroad bridge is."

During the ride that followed, the two lads conversed on various topics, Jack asking many questions about the country in that vicinity. He made cautious inquiries as to whether there was any alarm out for his arrest, and found, to his relief, that there was not.

Arriving at the bridge, the country lad, who said his name was Ferd Armstrong, tied his horse, and went down to the edge of the creek to help Jack look for his property.

"That's about where it fell in," said Jack, throwing a stone into the water as nearly as he could

at the spot where he had seen the case disappear. "Maybe if I had a long pole I could fish it out."

"I know a better way than that," volunteered Ferd.

"How?"

Take off your shoes and stockings and wade in. I'll help ye."

The boys did this, and soon were walking carefully about in the creek, peering here and there for a sight of the case. The stream was clear, and they could see bottom almost everywhere. But there was no sign of the flat valise.

"Th' current must have carried it below th' bridge," suggested Ferd. "We'll look there. But don't wade under th' bridge. There's deep holes there, made by an eddy. It's over yer head in one place."

They walked along the bank until they were below the bridge, and then they resumed their search. Jack got a long pole and poked it into places where Ferd said it was too deep to wade, but their efforts were fruitless. The dresssuit case had disappeared.

"It's either been carried a long way downstream, or else some one saw it and walked off with it," declared Jack. "Well, I suppose I'll have to do without it. But it's tough luck."

"Where ye goin' now?" asked Ferd.

"I don't know, exactly. I must get a place to

work. Do you know of any farmers around here who might hire me?"

"Dunno's I do. They mostly have all th' hired men they need by now. Do ye know anythin' about milkin' cows?"

Jack shook his head.

"If ye did, dad might hire ye," went on the young farmer. "He needs a hand to milk cows. Th' last man we had left because a cow kicked him."

"Then I don't think I'd care for the place."

"Oh, pshaw! A cow kick ain't nothin'. Their feet is soft. A hoss hurts when he kicks ye, though."

"I should think he would. I don't believe I care to be kicked by either. Well, if you don't think there's any chance to get work around here, I'll have to travel on," and Jack spoke rather wearily.

"Ye might git a job at th' dairy where I'm takin' this milk," went on Ferd. "They have lots of men an' boys. If you want, I'll give ye a lift there, an' ye kin ask. I know th' foreman of th' cheese department."

"Thanks, I'll try it. I'm afraid I have put you to a lot of bother as it is."

"Aw, shucks! That ain't nothin'. I got up early t'-day, an' I've got lots of time. Usually I'm two hours later than this bringin' over th' milk from our place."

"What was your hurry this morning?"

"I want t' git back quick, so's I kin go t' th' circus. I ain't been t' one in two year."

"Is there a circus coming here?" asked Jack, a sudden idea coming into his mind.

"It's comin' t' Mulford; that's the next town. It's a dandy show. I seen th' pictures. Be ye goin'?"

"I don't see how I can, very well," replied Jack, though he did not say that the reason was because he had no money. "I must look for a place to work."

"Maybe ye'll git a job at th' dairy."

"Well, I hope I do, but if I should I couldn't leave it to go to a circus."

"No, I suppose not. Waal, that's hard luck. G'lang there, Dobbin," this last to his horse. "Waal, I'm goin'. I've been savin' up fer it over three months. I've got a dollar an' thirteen cents. I kin git in fer half a dollar, an' have sixty-three cents t' spend."

"I guess you'll have a good time," commented Jack.

"Betcher boots I will! That's what I got up so early fer. Say," Ferd added, as if a new thought had come to him, "did ye have yer breakfast?"

"I had some breakfast," replied Jack. He hardly felt like calling it his regular morning meal.

"I jest happened t' think they don't serve meals

in freight cars," went on the country lad, with a shrewd smile. "Say, how'd ye like a nice drink of rich milk? Our cows give fine milk."

"I'd like it very much," answered Jack. "But can you spare it?"

"Shucks, yes! I've got a hundred an' sixty quarts here in these cans. Wait; I'll git ye a good drink."

"I haven't a cup or a glass," objected Jack, "and I'm afraid I can't drink out of one of those cans."

"I'll fix it," replied Ferd. He stopped the horse and then, removing the top of one of the cans, tilted the receptacle over until a stream of thick, creamy milk flowed into the cover.

"There ye are," he announced. "Drink that, an' it'll make ye feel better."

It certainly did. Jack thought it was the best beverage he had ever had, not even excepting an icecream soda.

The ride was resumed, and soon they came in sight of a series of low buildings.

"That's the dairy," announced Ferd. "Now we'll see if ye kin git a job there."

CHAPTER XI

JACK AT THE CIRCUS

FERD drove the wagon up to one of the buildings where a low, broad platform opened into a room with a concrete floor, about which stood many milk cans. In one corner was a big tank, partly filled with milk.

Jack was interested in what followed. Greeting with a cheery "good morning" the man in charge, Fred proceeded to lift out his cans of milk to the platform of a scale.

"Do you weigh the milk?" asked Jack. "I thought it went by measure."

"We weigh it here," answered the man. "That's the way they do at most dairies and cheese factories."

Ferd was given a ticket showing how much milk he had delivered, and then turning his wagon about, he drove to a pump that stood on a sort of elevated tank, with a trough extending from it to a height convenient for the vehicle.

"What you going to do now?" asked Jack.

"Pump up some sour milk for th' pigs," replied Ferd. "After that I'll take you to th' foreman of the cheese factory."

He stepped up to the pump and began to work the handle.

"Jest hold that trough over one of th' cans, will ye?" he asked Jack.

Our hero did as directed, and, as the country lad pumped, a stream of curdled milk flowed into the cans that had just been emptied.

"This is what's left after they take out th' cream, or use th' milk for cheese," explained Ferd. "It's fine fer pigs. Ours love it, an' I take some home every trip."

He filled two cans with the refuse part of the milk, and then, driving his horse out of the way of any other farmers who might want to get some of the sour milk for their pigs, for it was given away by the dairy, Ferd invited Jack to accompany him.

"I hope you git a job," he remarked, in friendly tones.

"So do I," replied Jack. "But if I don't get one here I may land a place somewhere else," for he had a certain plan in his mind, though he did not want to speak about it.

"Hey, Si," called Ferd to a good-natured looking man, who stood in the doorway of another low building. "How be ye?"

"Pritty tol'able. How's yerself?"

"Fine. I got up early t' go t' th' circus. Here's a friend of mine. Can't ye give him a job turnin' cheeses?" For cheeses have to be turned around quite often to "ripen" properly, and it is quite a task in a dairy where they make hundreds of them.

"Waal, now, if you'd come yist'day I could 'a' done it," replied Silas Martin, who was foreman of the cheese department. "But we put a feller on last night, an' there ain't no place now."

"Is there any other opening here?" asked Jack, speaking for himself.

"I don't believe there is," replied the foreman. "I'd be glad to give you a place if I had one, but I can't. Do you like cheese?" he asked.

"I'm quite fond of it," answered Jack.

"Come in and I'll give you some that's nice and mild," went on Mr. Martin. "Want t' take some home, Ferd? Your daddy likes it. It's full cream, and it's just right."

"Sure," replied Jack's new friend.

The two boys went into the cheese room, which smelled quite appetizing. The foreman gave them each large portions of cheese, wrapped in paper.

"This will help out on my meals," thought Jack.

"Wait a minute," called Mr. Martin, as the boys were about to leave. "There's suthin' that allers goes with cheese. Can ye guess what it is?" he asked.

"Crackers?" replied our hero questioningly.

"Crackers is one thing, an' apple pie's another. My wife put me up a lunch this mornin' an' I guess she thought I must have a terrible appetite. I've got more'n I want."

He went to a closet and came back with some crisp crackers, and two large pieces of pie, which he insisted that the boys take.

"I've got twice as much left as I kin eat," he said.

Jack accepted his portion with many thanks, and Ferd put his in one of his big pockets. When he got outside he said to Jack:

"Say, I ain't got no use fer this. I had a hearty breakfast, and I'll have a bully dinner before I go to th' circus. Take this."

He handed over his cheese, pie, and crackers.

"Sure you don't want it?" asked Jack.

"Sure not. It might come in handy fer you if ye—if ye ain't got no money."

"Well, I certainly haven't any money, and I'll take this very gladly, if you don't want it."

"Naw. I don't want it. Say, if ye'll come back with me I'll see that ye git a good dinner."

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," replied Jack. "But I think I'll go on. If I thought I could get a job at your farm I'd go with you, but I know nothing about milking or work about cows

and horses. I think I'll travel on. But I want to thank you for what you've done for me."

"Aw, that's all right," responded Ferd. "I wish I could 'a' helped ye find th' satchel thet fell in th' creek."

"So do I, but I guess it's gone."

Bidding good-by to the kind and hospitable farm lad, Jack, who had inquired the shortest way to Mulford, set out for that town, carrying the food supplies which had so unexpectedly been given him.

"Luck is beginning to turn my way," he thought. "When I get to where the circus is I'm going to try and get a job there."

It was quite a tramp to Mulford, and it was noon when Jack came in sight of the town, which lay in a sheltered valley. He could see the white tents of the circus, gay with many colored flags, and his heart beat faster, as does that of every boy when he nears the scene where one of the canvas-sheltered shows hold forth.

Though it was early, there was quite a crowd about, watching the men erect some of the smaller tents, arranging the wagons, or cooking the dinner for the performers and helpers.

"Guess I'll eat my lunch, and then look about," decided Jack. The crackers, cheese, and pie tasted most excellent, and when he had taken a long

drink from a spring, which served to supply the circus, he felt in shape to look about for a job.

He strolled over to where a gang of men were putting up a tent. Something seemed to be going wrong, and the man in charge was out of patience.

"What's the matter with you gazaboos?" he asked tartly. "You pull on the wrong rope every time. Here, haul on the other one, I tell you! What's the matter with you? Do you want this tent to get up to-day or some time next week? Yank on that other rope, I tell you! Good land! You're worse than a lot of monkeys! Pull on that short rope!" he fairly yelled.

The particular man at whom he was directing his remarks did not appear to understand. He pulled on a long rope, instead of a short one, and the tent, which was nearly up, was about to fall down. Jack saw what was wanted. He sprang forward, and, just in time to save the big stretch of canvas from collapsing, he hauled on the proper rope, pulling it into place.

"That's what I wanted," said the man in charge. "It's a pity you fellers wouldn't take lessons off that lad. He don't need a tent-stake hammer to have sense knocked into his head. Hold that rope a minute, sonny, and I'll come over there and fasten it. I never see such a lot of dumb idiots in all my born days!"

Jack held the rope until the man took it from him, and fastened it properly.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said gratefully to our hero. "Only for you the whole blamed business would have been on the ground."

"You're welcome," answered Jack. Then a sudden idea came to him. "You don't want any more helpers, do you?" he asked.

"Well, I do need a couple of hands," was the rather unexpected answer. "If you want to stick around, and help out, I'll give you a couple of tickets to the show."

"I'll do it," replied Jack, for he had a further scheme he wanted to try and this just fitted in with it.

"All right," spoke the man in charge of the tents. "Come with me. I'll find something for you to do."

Jack was soon engaged in helping put up other tents, in carrying gasoline torches here and there, filling them, and getting ready for the night performance, though the afternoon one had not yet been held. Several times the man who had engaged him came around to see how he was getting on.

"You're all right, kid," he said heartily. "You'll do. I wish I had a few more like you. Here, just take this note over to the ticket wagon. Tell the man Ike Landon, the boss canvasman,

sent you. He'll give you a couple of good seats. I guess you can knock off now. We're in pretty good shape."

He scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it to Jack, who took it over to the ticket wagon. It was drawing close to the time for the performance, and there was quite a throng in front of the gaudily painted vehicle.

As Jack was working his way through the press to the window, he heard a familiar voice ask:

"Waal, are ye goin' to th' show? Thought ye didn't have no money."

"Why, Ferd," exclaimed Jack, recognizing his friend of the milk wagon. "I'm glad to see you," he went on. "Have you bought your ticket yet?"

"Nope, but I'm goin' to."

"Wait a minute, then. I can get two, and I'll give you one."

"Two? How ye goin' to git two?"

"I'll show you."

By this time Jack had managed to reach the window. He handed in the note, saying:

"Ike Landon, the boss canvasman, sent me with that."

"It's all right," replied the ticket man, as he glanced at the piece of paper. "Here are a couple of reserved seats."

"Say, ye're a peach!" exclaimed Ferd admir-

ingly, when Jack gave him one of the pasteboard slips. "How'd ye do it?"

"Oh, I pulled the right rope in time," replied Jack, as he and his new friend went inside the tent, where the band was playing a lively air.

CHAPTER XII

JACK DOES A STUNT

"SAY, ain't this bully!" exclaimed Ferd, as the procession which begins each circus performance wound slowly around the arena. "It's immense! I wouldn't 'a' missed it fer a lot. I'm glad I met you. Now I've got half a dollar more to spend on stuff to eat. Besides, this is a better seat than I would 'a' got."

"Yes, the seats are all right," admitted Jack.

"Ain't you hungry?" went on Ferd, though he did not take his eyes off the procession of animals, chariots and performers. "I am," he continued, not waiting for an answer. "Let's have some hot frankfurter sandwiches."

A man with a basket of them was passing among the audience. Jack eyed the brown sausages, in between the white rolls, with a hungry eye. The crackers, cheese, and pie had not been very "filling."

"Hey, there! Give us some of them," called Ferd to the man.

"How many? Speak quick. I've got to get out of here in a hurry, before the performance begins," replied the vender.

"Four," replied the farmer boy. "Ye can eat two, can't ye?" he inquired of Jack, who nodded his head in assent.

"Say, these are all right," remarked the runaway lad, as he munched the meat and bread, on which had been spread a liberal quantity of mustard. "I'm glad I met you, Ferd."

"Then we're even. But here comes the acrobats. I like to watch 'em," he added, as the procession came to an end, amid a blare of trumpets, and the show proper began.

It was like any other traveling circus, better than some, but not as good as the large ones, even though the gaudy posters did announce that the "Combined Bower & Brewster Aggregation of Monster Menagerie, Hippodrome, Amphitheatre and Colossal Exhibition challenged comparison with any similar amusement enterprise in the entire world."

"Look at that clown!" exclaimed Ferd. "Why, there's a whole lot of 'em," he added. "Gosh! but this is great! I never saw such a good show! I don't know which way to look!"

In fact, so many things were going on at the same time that it was difficult to select any particular feature for observation.

There were men and women on high trapezes, others doing balancing feats on elevated platforms, still others performing on the backs of horses, while in a ring near the two boys ten elephants were being put through their paces.

Jack had often been to a circus before, and now, from a reason for which he could hardly account, he paid particular attention to the antics of the clowns.

"I believe I could do as good as some of them, with a little practice," he thought. "What is needed is some sort of funny stunt to make the people laugh. It doesn't much matter what it is, as long as it's funny."

The clowns did seem to cause considerable laughter. Some of them had trained dogs, pigs or roosters which they used in their act. Others had a partner who aided them in provoking smiles or shouts of glee. Some did acrobatic stunts, some sang or danced, and one, with the help of a companion, acted as a barber using a whitewash brush to spread the lather on his partner's face.

"This is the kind of life that would suit me for a while," said Jack to himself. "I'd like to travel with a circus, and I believe I could do as good as some of those clowns, if I had a chance. What's more, I'm going to try for a job here. I'll ask the boss canvasman if there isn't a chance. I'd just like to be with the show, and maybe I could earn

enough money in the season to pay my way to China, and see what has happened to my folks."

This thought so occupied Jack that he paid little attention to the performance. He made up his mind he would seek out one of the managers, as soon as the show was over, and make his request.

"Say! Look at that! Did ye see it?" suddenly exclaimed Ferd.

"See what?"

"Why, that man jumped over ten elephants in a line!"

"That's pretty good," remarked Jack indifferently.

"Pretty good? I should say it was. I'd like to see you do it."

"I think I'll do it," spoke Jack, who had just arrived at a certain decision.

"What? Jump over ten elephants?" asked his companion, in astonishment. "Say, are you dreamin'?"

"That's right; I guess I was," admitted Jack, with a laugh. "I was thinking about something else."

"Guess you don't care much about a circus," said Ferd.

"I'm thinking too much of getting a job," replied Jack.

Ferd shook his head as if he could not understand Jack's indifference. After the performance

the farm boy wanted to treat Jack to popcorn, soda, and more frankfurters. Jack declined everything but the sausage sandwiches.

"I can save them to eat when I'm hungry," he said in explanation. "I may need a meal tonight."

"Why don't you come home and stay with me a few days?" suggested Ferd. "My folks wouldn't care, and maybe you could get a job somewhere in the neighborhood."

Jack thanked his new friend, but said he had other plans. A little later he parted from Ferd, and, by inquiring, he found the boss canvasman, who was taking a rest after his labors in superintending the erection of the tents.

Jack explained what he wanted—an introduction to the manager, who had charge of hiring the performers.

"Sure I'll take you to him," replied Ike Landon, "only I don't believe you can do anything he'd want. Circus performers have to train for a good while."

"Well, maybe I can do something to earn a little," replied Jack. "Where will I find the manager? What's his name?"

"His name is Jim Paine, and he's a strict manager, let me tell you. But if you make good, why, he's all right. Come on over and I'll introduce you to him."

Jack followed the canvasman across the circus grounds, from which most of the audience had gone. Preparations were already under way for the evening performance.

"Mr. Paine, here's a lad who wants to join our circus," remarked Landon, with a grin, as he presented Jack. "He did me a good turn this morning, and I'd like to help him if I could."

"Ha! Hum!" exclaimed the manager, looking at Jack sharply. The runaway noticed that Mr. Paine was a very pompous sort of person. He wore a red vest, with yellow spots on it, a big red tie, in which sparkled a large stone, and he had an immense watch chain.

Jack wondered if the manager was not going to say anything more than "Ha! Hum!" But presently the big man made another remark.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"Well, not very much, perhaps," replied Jack. "I'd like to learn to be a clown, but I'd be willing to knock around and do almost anything for a while, until I learned the business."

"Run away from home?" asked the manager snappily.

"Yes," replied Jack quickly, determined to tell as much as was necessary of what had happened.

"Ha! Hum! First time I ever knew a boy who had run away from home to admit it," spoke

the manager. "You deserve credit for that, anyway. What's the trouble?"

Thereupon Jack told of the unjust accusation of the old professor, and what had happened to him since he had left Westville.

"So you want to be a clown, eh?" said the manager when Jack's story was finished. "Had any training?"

"I used to take the part in amateur shows me and my chums got up, and I did a stunt on a vaudeville stage one night."

"Let's see what you can do?"

Jack's heart beat fast. Here was the very chance he wanted. Could he "make good?" So much depended on the first impression.

"Is there a place where I can make up?" he asked.

"Make up? Do you know how to make up?"

"A little bit."

"Well, if Ike Landon says you helped him, you must be all right, for he's a hard man to please. If you're going to have a try-out, you might as well do it proper. You can go to the dressing tent."

"Where is it?"

"Right over there," and the manager pointed. "Ike will show you. Tell Sam Kyle to give him a hand," the manager called after the boss canvasman. "I'll wait here for him," he added.

"Say, you're in luck," said Ike. "It ain't many he'd give such a chance to. Do you know what you're going to do?"

"A little."

Jack was introduced to a small, fat man, who, in the men's dressing tent, was busy washing the red and white paint off his face.

"Sam is the head clown," explained the canvasman. "He's been in the business—let's see, how long is it now, Sam?"

"Forty years this season. I was one of the first clowns that Barnum ever hired. You'll find some grease paint over there," he added to Jack; and then he and the canvasman began to talk about matters connected with the circus, paying no more attention to the runaway lad.

Jack was quite nervous, but he made up after an original idea of his own. He turned his coat and vest wrongside out, and, with the aid of Ike, put them on backwards. Then, feeling rather foolish over what he was about to do, he stepped from the dressing tent and walked over to where the manager had said he would wait for him.

Several of the performers who saw Jack emerge laughed at his curious costume and "make-up."

"Well, I must look funny, no matter how I feel," he said. "I hope I can do my funny dance."

"Ha! Hum!" exclaimed the manager, when he

saw Jack. "That's not so bad. Let's see what you can do."

A crowd of performers, and some of the circus helpers, gathered in a ring about the boy. Then Jack began. He repeated some of the things he had done in the theatre at home, but added to them. He sang, he danced, and cut all sorts of capers, gaining more and more confidence in himself as he heard the crowd laughing. He even detected a smile on the rather grim face of the manager.

Then, to cap his performance, Jack caught up a couple of paper-covered hoops, or rings, similar to those through which some of the performers jumped from the backs of running horses. Holding these under his arms, like a pair of wings, he began to imitate a clumsy bird. He hopped up on a board that rested across a saw-horse, and, from that elevation, pretended to fly to the ground, but doing it so grotesquely that he stepped through both hoops and was all tangled up in them.

This produced some hearty laughs, and one or two of the women performers applauded, for Ike had whispered to them what Jack's trial meant.

"Ha! Hum! Not so bad," remarked the manager, though his voice was not very cordial. "That imitation flying was well done. That might be worked up. I think we can use another clown, as I'm one short. I'll engage you, young

man. You'll get ten dollars a week, and your board, of course. Can you come right on the road?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ha! Hum! Well, perhaps we can work you into shape. You need some practice, but it's not so bad; it's not so bad. You can consider yourself engaged. Report to Sam Kyle."

Jack could hardly believe his good luck. An hour before he had not known where his next meal was coming from. Now he was engaged as a clown in a large circus.

CHAPTER XIII

PLANNING AN ACT

"Say," remarked Ike Landon, when Jack had made his way through the little ring of performers, "you did better than I thought you would. The old man—I mean the boss—is mighty hard to please. If you attend strictly to business now, there's no reason why you can't become a first-class performer."

"I'm going to try," said Jack. "I need the money for a particular purpose, for I'm determined to locate my folks if I can. I'll do my best."

"I'll tell Sam to give you a few pointers. He knows the business from A to Z, backwards and forwards, and he isn't jealous of a new performer like lots of 'em in this game. You stick to Sam and you'll be all right."

"Do you suppose I can perform to-night?" asked Jack.

"I don't know. Maybe so. Ask Sam."

Jack found the head clown eating his early supper in the big dining tent.

"Sit down and eat with me," invited Mr. Kyle, when Ike had related the result of the runaway's trial. "I don't like to cut up capers on a full stomach," he went on, "so I eat early. Well, I hear you made good."

"Mr. Paine seemed to like what I did, though I don't know that it was very funny," replied Jack modestly.

"It's not so easy to make people laugh," spoke the old clown. "I've known elaborate acts to fall as flat as a pancake, and, again, some simple little thing would bring roars of laughter. It all depends on how it's done. I've been at it forty years, and I've still got things to learn."

"Do you think it's a good thing to have a specialty?" asked Jack, as he began to eat of the plain but wholesome food which a waiter set before him.

"The best thing in the world. My specialty is taking the part of animals, and I may say I've been quite successful. If you can get up a novel act, something that's up-to-date, and which will hit the popular fancy, you're all right."

Mr. Kyle spoke quite seriously, and it seemed rather odd to see him thus, when Jack remembered what a queer figure he had presented while in the ring, attired as a big rooster.

"I was thinking of getting up some special act," said Jack.

"What was it?" asked Sam quickly. "You want to be careful of one thing," he went on. "Don't try to imitate any of the other clowns. If you do they'll get down on you. Besides, one act of a kind is enough. What were you thinking of trying?"

"I thought some stunt that had to do with a flying machine wouldn't be bad," replied Jack. "You know there's so much of that going on now that the public is interested. I might get up something to look like an airship, pretend to fly in it, and come tumbling down. Do you think that would take?"

"It might. At any rate, it wouldn't be any harm to try."

"I was wondering how I could get a make-believe airship made."

"Why, Pete Delafield, the property man, will help you out if you ask him. He makes all the things the other clowns and I use in our acts. Of course you can't get it for to-night, though."

"Oh, no, I don't expect to. I'll have to plan it out, and think up how I'm going to act. Where can I find Mr. Delafield?"

"I'll take you to him after we finish eating. You'll go on to-night, won't you?"

"Mr. Paine didn't say anything about it, but I'd like to, if you think I'm good enough."

"Well, it won't much matter at night. You can go out in the ring when I go, and do your stunt. Even if the audience doesn't laugh at you, you'll gain confidence, so when you're ready with your airship act you'll not be afraid."

"That will be a good idea," replied Jack. "I'm much obliged to you."

"That's all right. I'll go with you to Pete Delafield in a minute."

While Mr. Kyle was finishing his second cup of coffee, a stout man, whose manner at once proclaimed that he was inclined to be nervous and fussy, approached.

"I say, Sam," he began. "What do you think of this? 'A Death-Defying Double Dive Down a Dangerous, Darksome, Decapitated Declivity.' That's to advertise the new bicycle ride down a broken incline, which we're going to spring next week. How does that sound to you?"

"I'd say 'descent' instead of 'dive,' " suggested Mr. Kyle. "There's no water in it, is there?"

"No, but I might have 'em put a tank under it. But I guess you're right. I'll change it," and he hurried away, writing as he went on a bit of paper, and murmuring to himself: "Death-Defying Descent Down," etc. Jack looked at the head clown, as if asking who the man was.

"That's Nolan Waddleton, our adjective man," said Mr. Kyle.

"The adjective man?"

"Yes. He gets up all the big words to describe the special acts and attractions. Maybe he'll be putting yours in big type on the posters some day."

"Not much hope of that."

"You never can tell, my boy. You may make a big hit. I hope you do. But come on, now, we'll go see the property man."

Jack was introduced to Mr. Delafield, who agreed to make Jack as good an imitation of a small airship as possible, provided the boy would describe what he wanted.

"I'll have it for you the middle of next week," he said. "I've got to make a fake automobile for Ted Chester," he added to Mr. Kyle.

"Is Ted going to do an auto stunt?" asked the head clown. "That's pretty stale now."

"Well, Ted thinks he can freshen it up. It's none of my affair. I'm here to obey orders."

"That's so, but I don't believe Ted will make a hit with an auto. He had one last season, and the people are sort of getting tired of them."

"That's what I say, but you can't convince Ted."

"No, I suppose not. Well, Jack, come on over

to my tent, and I'll give you a few pointers about to-night. I want to see you make good," and the kind old clown led our hero over to the rehearsing tent, a part of which was screened off for his own use.

CHAPTER XIV

HIS FIRST PERFORMANCE

JACK was more nervous than he had thought he would be when he got ready for his first performance that evening. Under Mr. Kyle's direction he painted his face, and then he donned a suit belonging to a clown who had left the circus because of ill health.

"Well, you look as good as the average clown," said Jack's friend when the boy was fully attired. "Now, it's what you do that will count to-night, and until you get your new act. Then you may find it easier to make a hit. Don't be nervous. You may think all in the tent are looking at you, but they're not. Go ahead just as if you were doing it for Mr. Paine. He's the one that counts, for if he doesn't like your act he'll discharge you."

"I hope I can do as well as I did this afternoon," said Jack.

"Oh, you will, I'm sure. Just remember what I told you. When you speak, speak slowly and distinctly. A falsetto voice carries a good dis-

tance. I used to be able to manage one, but I can't any more. I'm too old. But you can."

There was a glamour about the circus at night that was absent in the daytime. Under the flickering gasolene torches the dingiest suit looked fine, and the spangles sparkled as they never would in the sun.

The band struck up a lively air. Once more the procession of performers and animals paraded around the big tent. Jack felt his heart beating loudly. So far he only saw the bright side of the circus life. It was all gaiety and excitement to him now. But he was soon to know the other and darker side.

"We'll go on in a minute, now," said Sam Kyle to Jack. "You certainly know how to make up well. Lots of clowns take a year to learn that."

Mr. Kyle was adjusting a long black patch over one eye, making his appearance more grotesque than before. Suddenly the band stopped playing. The last of the procession, having finished the circuit, wound out of the ring. Then came a blare of trumpets.

"Come on!" cried Sam, and he ran from the dressing-tent into the big canvas-covered arena, where the performance had started. Other clowns followed him, and a score of additional performers—acrobats, tumblers and tight-rope walkers—ran out. Jack followed more slowly. This was to

be the real test. He wondered how he would succeed.

He decided he would repeat the same thing he had done for the manager that afternoon. He had secured several of the paper-covered hoops, and he resolved to give as odd an imitation of a man trying to fly as possible.

Once he had passed beyond the canvas curtain that shut off the dressing-tent from the main one, Jack beheld a scene that he long remembered. In the light of the big gasolene torches, high up on the tent poles, he saw many performers going through their acts. There came to his nostrils the smell of freshly-turned earth that formed the ring banks, the damp sawdust, the odor of wild animals, the stifling whiff of gasolene. He heard the music of the band, the shouts of the ringmasters, the high, shrill laughter of the clowns. And he heard other sounds. They were the merry shouts and applause of the big audience.

For there was a large throng present. Jack looked about on the sloping banks of people. Their faces showed curiously white and their eyes oddly black in the brilliant lights. Jack's mind was in a whirl.

But he was suddenly roused from his daze by a sharp voice calling to him.

"Say, what's the matter with you? Going to

stand there all day? What are you paid for? Get busy! Do something!"

Then came the sharp crack of a whip, and Jack jumped, for the end of the lash had caught him on the legs, which were but thinly protected with his cotton clown suit.

"Jump lively!" cried the voice, and Jack turned to see Otto Mitz, the ringmaster, in his dress suit and white gloves, waving his long whip. Once more the lash came curling toward Jack, but he jumped aside in time to avoid it. There was a laugh from that portion of the audience in front of which he stood. Doubtless they thought it was part of the show.

With anger in his heart at the man who had been so needlessly cruel, Jack broke into a little run. Though he had not known it, he was suffering a little bit from "stage fright." The ringmaster had cured him of it. The boy felt a fierce desire to make the people laugh heartily—to show that he could "make good."

He began his antics. Selecting a portion of the large outer ring where there were no other clowns, Jack did a funny dance, interspersed with snatches of songs, though the band rather interfered with this. Then seeing a board and a saw-horse near him, he put them into place, so that he might jump from the end of the plank, in his pretended flying act.

Flapping the big paper hoops, as a bird does its wings, Jack leaped from the end of the spring-board. He tangled himself all up in the rings, one coming around his neck and the other encircling his legs. Then flapping his arms like the sails of an old-fashioned windmill, he trotted off amid the laughter and applause of the throng.

He had been told by Sam Kyle that all the clowns repeated their acts four times, in different parts of the ring, so that the entire audience might see them. Bearing this in mind, Jack prepared to go through the same stunt a little farther along. He succeeded even better than at first, and his funny antics earned him loud applause.

"Ha! hum! Not so bad," murmured a voice near him, as he finished his second attempt. He looked up and saw Mr. Paine.

"Keep it up, my boy," said the manager. "I guess you'll do."

Jack was grateful for the praise, and almost forgot the mean ringmaster, though his leg still smarted where the lash had struck him.

But if Jack thought he was to have such an easy time winning success, he was mistaken. He was going through his turn for the fourth and last time when, just as he "flew" from the end of the board, Ted Chester came along, doing a stunt in a miniature automobile in which he sat, propelling it with his feet. Unfortunately, Jack

landed right in front of the other clown, who ran into him, upsetting himself and overturning the auto.

This time the crowd applauded more heartily than ever. They thought it was done purposely. Jack arose, trying to untangle himself from the paper hoops, in which he found himself fastened differently than at any time before. He was surprised to see Ted Chester glaring at him.

"You did that on purpose!" exclaimed the older clown in a low voice. "You wanted to spoil my act."

"No, I didn't. It was an accident," replied Jack, rubbing his shin where he had struck it on the small auto.

"I say you did! I'll fix you! I'll complain to Mr. Paine, that's what I'll do. I'm not going to the trouble of getting up a good act to have a green kid like you put it on the blink. Get out of my way or I'll punch your head. I'll get even with you for this," and he shook his fist in Jack's face.

The audience took this for part of a pre-arranged act, and shouted their approval at the quarrel between the two clowns. This made Ted madder than ever.

"I'll have you fired!" he exclaimed as he righted the auto and started off with it. "I'll not work in a ring where there are such clumsy dolts as

you. What's the profession coming to when they take in green kids that don't know anything about acting? But you won't be with the show to-morrow, I'll guarantee that!"

"I didn't mean to interfere with you," said Jack. "It was an accident."

"Oh, I've heard that story before," sneered Ted. "You wanted to spoil my act. You're jealous of me because I get the most applause. So are the other clowns. I shouldn't wonder but what some of 'em put you up to it. But I'll get square with you and them, too."

"Nobody put me up to it. It was an accident," insisted the young clown, but Ted, without answering, made his way to the dressing-tent.

CHAPTER XV

JACK HAS ENEMIES

THE circus performance was almost over. They were getting ready for the chariot and other races which would bring the program to an end. Jack went to the tent where he had made-up as a clown. He found scores of the men performers getting off their ring outfits and putting on their regular garments. The clowns were washing off the grease paint.

"There he is now!" exclaimed a voice as Jack entered the tent. "There's the fresh kid that spoiled my act. He did it on purpose, too. If I find out who put him up to it——"

"Look here!" exclaimed Jack, who intended to maintain his rights. "You needn't say that, for it isn't so. I've told you it was an accident."

"Well, I say it wasn't."

"What's the row?" asked Sam Kyle, coming into the tent after a burst of applause had testified to his abilities as an entertainer. "What's up,

Ted? You seem angry, my child," and he assumed a playful, theatrical air.

"Cut that out!" replied Ted in a surly tone.

"Ah, you are peevish, little one," went on Sam, who was a great joker, outside as well as inside the ring.

"Ted says the new kid spoiled his auto act," remarked a clown whose specialty was to lead a little dog about the ring with a rope big enough to hold a battleship fastened on the beast's neck.

"That's what he did," spoke Ted. "He jumped right down on me with those paper hoops, and spoiled my act."

"It was an accident," put in Jack hotly.

"We'll see what Mr. Paine thinks," went on Ted wrathfully. "I'm going to report to him."

"You'll report to me first," declared Sam. "I'm in charge of this part of the show. Jack, let's hear your story."

Without stopping to remove his clown dress, Jack told exactly what had happened, and how the thing had occurred so quickly that it had been

"Now it's your turn," said the head clown to Ted, and the latter made it appear that it was Jack's fault. Some of the other performers, however, had seen what had taken place, and their version made it clear that it was an accident.

"You can report to Mr. Paine if you want to," said Sam, when he had declared that he believed

our hero, "but that's all the good it will do. Jack stays."

"Oh, he does, eh?" replied Ted. "We'll see about that."

But he did not go to Mr. Paine, for which Jack was grateful, for the boy thought perhaps, in spite of Sam Kyle being his friend, the manager might discharge him.

"Don't mind Ted," said the head clown as he took Jack aside and showed him how best to remove the grease paint from his face. "He thinks every performer is trying to spoil his act. He's jealous, that's all. But look out for him. He'll try to make trouble for you, and he has an ugly temper. Keep away from that part of the ring where he is, and you'll get along all right. I watched you to-night. You did pretty well. Keep at it."

"Thanks," replied Jack gratefully. "I think I can do a better act when I get my flying machine. Where do we show next?"

"At Haddington. That's a big city. But you'd better hustle, now, and get to the train."

Jack finished removing his make-up, and then donned his street clothes. He was given a trunk by Sam, in which to put his clown outfit and some tubes of grease paint. So far his baggage was very light.

"Come on with me and I'll see that you get a

place in the sleeping-car," said Sam, for the Bower & Brewster Show had its own special train, with quarters for the hundreds of performers, employees and animals.

Outside the dressing-tent Jack found that very little of the circus remained. The menagerie had entirely disappeared, and now men were beginning to take down the big tent. It was quite a different scene from the one of an hour before. Then it had been light, lively and gay, with strains of music and the laughter of the crowd.

Now it was dark; on all sides were rumbling wagons drawn by struggling horses, and men were shouting and calling to one another, trying to get their vehicles loaded so they could drive them to the flatcars by which they were transported. Yet though there was seeming confusion, everything was done by a careful system.

Jack found that the interior of the sleeping-car was not much like the regular Pullmans. But it answered the purpose, and he soon followed the example of the other circus performers and crawled into his bunk. He was tired, yet the excitement of what he had gone through kept him awake. Then, too, there were many disturbing noises caused by making up the train and loading the big wagons containing the tents, poles, supplies and animal cages.

Gentle snores on all sides of him told Jack that

his companions were not disturbed by what, to him, were unusual things, for they fell asleep almost as soon as their heads touched the pillows. Finally sharp whistles of the locomotives told him that the train was ready to start, and soon he felt himself being lulled to slumber by the motion of the car and the steady click-clack as the wheels passed over the rail joints.

He was roused from his sleep by some one shaking him, and he looked up to see the good-natured face of Sam Kyle looking in on him.

"Time for breakfast," announced the head clown.

"Breakfast? Is there a dining-car on the train?"

"Yes, for the manager and the star performers, but we'll take ours in the tent."

"The tent? I thought—why—are we at the next place where we're going to show?"

"That's what," answered Sam. "Come on. It's only a short walk to the grounds, and if you don't hustle there may be no steak left."

Jack looked from the window of his berth. He saw that the train was in a railroad yard, and from the flatcars men were sliding down the big animal cages.

He hurriedly dressed, made his toilet in the washroom of the car, and went out to find Sam waiting for him. They were soon at the circus

grounds, and the boy clown saw a crowd of men laying out the canvas for the big tent. The animal tent was already up, as was the dining one. While Jack had been sleeping the circus employees had been busy at work.

Many performers were arriving from the train, and there was an appetizing smell of coffee and meat on the fresh morning air. Gathered about were scores of small boys, and Jack remembered the time when he, as a little lad, used to get up early to see the circus come in. Men were leading the camels and elephants to water, hundreds of horses were being driven here and there, there was the rumble of heavy wagons containing tents and poles, the deeper thunder of the wheels of the chariots and gilded cages that went in the street parade, the sound of men yelling and shouting—seemingly confusion added to confusion. Yet slowly order was coming out of disorder.

"Come on," advised Sam. "There's a good meal waiting for us, and we don't want to be left."

Jack followed his friend toward the dining-tent. As he passed the heavy cage containing the hippopotamus, he heard a man, concealed on one side of it, saying:

"He says it was an accident, but I know better. Some one put him up to it. I'll spoil his act the first chance I get. I'll be even with him."

"Yes, and I'll help you," spoke another voice,

and then Jack saw Otto Mitz, the ringmaster, and Ted Chester walking away.

Jack had made two mean enemies since joining the circus, and through no fault of his own, for though he could understand why the clown should bear him a grudge, from not understanding how the accident had occurred, he saw no reason for the ringmaster holding enmity against him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLYING MACHINE

BREAKFAST was a much better meal than Jack had expected, from knowing the hurried manner in which it must have had to be prepared and under what adverse circumstances. But he was to learn that a circus cannot afford not to feed its employees and performers well, and that the preparation and cooking of meals had been reduced to a science. Large stoves were carried on wagons, the sides of which dropped down, making a regular kitchen. Soup was cooked in immense caldrons, and the supplies, which had been contracted for in advance, the bread, meat, milk, vegetables, as well as fodder for the animals, had been brought to the circus grounds by local dealers before daylight.

"I'm glad we've had good weather this week," observed Sam as he finished his third cup of coffee.

"Why? Did it rain much before I joined?" asked Jack, feeling somewhat of a veteran already, though it was only his second day with the show.

"Did it? Well, I should crack my grease paint!" Which was the clown's way of remarking that he should smile. "It rained for three days straight."

"And you have to show in the rain, I suppose?"

"Rain or shine, we go on. Only it's not much fun. It's cold and dreary, and the crowds don't laugh worth a cent. The sunshine for mine, every time."

Jack wondered whether he had better tell his friend what he had overheard near the hippopotamus wagon, but he decided he had better try to fight his own battles, or, at least, wait until he needed help against the schemes of his enemies.

For Jack was convinced that Ted Chester would endeavor to do him some injury. If not a physical one, the vindictive clown would probably try to interfere with Jack when the boy was doing his turn in the ring. This would cause him to fail to make the audience laugh, and he might get discharged.

"I'll keep away from the side of the ring where Ted is," thought the young clown. "I suppose I've got to be on the watch against that ringmaster, too. His whip certainly hurts. If he hits me again I'll tell Sam. I'm not going to stand it."

Jack found there was nothing special for him to do until the street parade was ready to start.

This had been omitted in the town they had just left, as the place was not considered important enough for such a demonstration. Here, however, one was to be given, and Jack learned that all the clowns were to ride on top of a big gilded wagon, each one playing some grotesque musical instrument.

"But I can't play anything but a mouth organ," the boy had objected to Sam, who told him what was expected of him.

"That doesn't make any difference. We only make all the noise we can on battered horns, broken drums and all the odd things the property man can get together. I'll give you a trumpet. All you'll have to do is to blow it as loud as you can."

Jack thought this would be easy enough, and he soon retired to the dressing-tent to make-up for the street parade. The big wagon on which the clowns were to ride was hauled by eight prancing horses, and when Jack saw it, and knew he was to be on it, he felt a sense of pride that he had so soon been able to make a place for himself in such a big aggregation as a circus.

"All clowns this way!" cried Sam Kyle as he came from the dressing-tent. "Here are your instruments."

The funnily-attired and painted men, including our hero, gathered around their leader, who handed out such a collection of noise-producing appa-

ratus as was seldom seen. Each one had once been a musical instrument, but time and accident, in some cases purposely done, had changed the character of them. Now they produced nothing but discordant sounds.

"All ready!" called Sam. "Get up!"

The clowns began to ascend to the top of the high wagon, which was fitted with cross-seats.

"Come! come! Hurry up!" cried Mr. Paine, running up to the clowns' wagon. "The parade ought to have started an hour ago."

"We're all ready," replied Sam.

"Step lively!" added another voice, and there came a crack like a pistol shot. At the same time Jack felt a stinging pain in his hip. He turned in time to see Otto Mitz, the ringmaster, swinging his vicious whip. The man did not have on his dress suit, but was ordinarily attired.

Jack started with the sudden pain, and Ted Chester laughed heartily.

"That's the way to wake him up," he said.

"Don't you do that again, Mitz!" exclaimed Sam Kyle, for he had seen the mean act.

"I guess I will if I like. I'm practicing."

"Then you try it on yourself," added Sam angrily.

"I'll try it on you if I feel like it," went on the ringmaster.

Sam, with a suddenness that took Mitz by sur-

prise, rushed up to him, grabbed the whip from his hand and threw it to one side.

"I wouldn't advise you to," he said quietly. "Don't you flick that lad again with your whip." And then he turned and began to ascend the wagon.

There was an ominous silence about the clowns' wagon, and more than one expected to see a fight between the ringmaster and Sam. But Mitz, with a deep flush on his face, walked over, picked up his whip, and disappeared into the dressing-tent.

"He'll have it in for you, Sam," remarked a jolly, fat little clown.

"I'm not afraid of him," replied Sam. "He's too free with his whip, and it's time some one told him so. Did he hurt you much?" he asked of Jack in a low voice.

"Not much," replied the lad, though the truth was the lash had bitten deep, and he had had hard work to refrain from crying out. But he bravely repressed his feelings.

Then the band on the wagon struck up, the steam calliope began to play, and the parade started. Soon the procession was in the midst of the streets of a fair-sized city. Jack, doing as he saw Sam and the other clown do, blew as loudly as possible on his trumpet. The grotesque music raised many a laugh, as did the funny antics of the clowns.

At times some of them stood up and made elaborate bows, as if in answer to applause, while others did little dance steps. But Jack sat silent, save when he blew the trumpet. He was beginning to see the darker side of the circus life.

"Be a little livelier," whispered the clown next to him. "There's no telling when the old man is watching."

By the "old man" was meant Manager Paine, though no disrespect was intended by this title. Thus urged, Jack tried to be gay and to cut some of his funny tricks, but it was with no light heart. He realized now what it meant to have to amuse a crowd when one felt the least like it.

He was glad when the parade was over and he could go back to the circus grounds. Sam told him he could take off his clown dress and wash up, as it would be several hours until the afternoon performance.

"A good dinner will make you feel better," said the head clown to the boy, for he understood how the lad felt, as he had heard Jack's story and had taken an unusual liking to him.

Our hero did feel better after the meal, and he looked forward, with something akin to real pleasure, to the performance in which he was to take part. The big tent was up now, and was gay with many-colored flags and banners. Jack strolled around to the side shows, and was amused in get-

ting a near view of the freaks, for he was a privileged character now.

"Well, boy, I'll have that flying machine for you sooner than I expected," said a voice at his elbow, and he turned to see Mr. Delafield, the property man. "I was speaking to Mr. Paine about it, and he thinks it a good idea. I'll have it for you the first of the week. We strike Stewartsville then, and that's quite a town. Suppose you come over to my tent and we'll take a look at what I've got done. Maybe you can suggest something."

This gave a new turn to Jack's thoughts. He found that the property man had carried out his ideas exactly, for Jack had made a rough sketch of what he wanted to introduce into his act.

The flying machine consisted of a big muslin bag, shaped like a cigar, and held distended by barrel hoops. This was to make it look as if filled with gas. Above it was a big Japanese umbrella, while below it was a sort of harness, holding a seat, which Jack could sit astride of.

On either side were big, tough paper-covered wings, working on hinges, and they could be operated by his feet. The handle of the big umbrella extended down through the distended muslin bag, so that Jack could grasp it with both hands.

His plan was, after going through some funny stunts, to pretend to pump up the bag with air.

Then he would carry the "flying machine" to the top of a small, light platform, which had been made for the purpose. After some further odd mannerisms he would jump to the ground, a distance of about thirty feet. The big umbrella he calculated would allow him to land without injury, and as he descended he would work the paper wings with his feet, giving a fairly good imitation of a person flying.

"What do you think of it?" asked Mr. Delafield. "Of course, it will be all painted up in bright colors before you use it."

"It's fine!" exclaimed Jack enthusiastically. "I wish it was ready now."

"There's quite a lot of work on it yet," said the property man. "But I'll have it for you the first of the week. I hope you make a hit with it."

"I will if I don't come down too heavy."

"Oh, that umbrella will hold you all right. You'll come down as easy as a piece of paper. I'll make it good and strong."

"Hello! hello! hello! What's this? What terror-inspiring bird of prey from the towering peaks of the Andes Mountains is about to perform before an awe-struck multitude for the first time in the history of the world?" asked another voice, and Jack and Mr. Delafield looked up to see the fat, jolly countenance of Nolan Waddleton, the "adjective man."

"Oh, this is a new machine for a flying clown," explained the property man. "Jack is going to spring something different."

"Ah, I must have that for my posters," said Mr. Waddleton. "That will be quite a drawing card. I need something fresh and new. Let's see. Nerve-thrilling trip through the terrestrial—— No, that won't do. You're going to keep off the earth. Through the towering—no, I've used that before. Oh, can't you give me a couple of adjectives, some of you?" and he looked appealingly at Sam and Jack.

"How would 'Startling sensation of a Simple Simon sailing serenely, supereminently and satisfactorily over the heads of a startled, strabismus-struck, sensation-satiated assemblage in an admirably adapted aeroplane' strike you?" asked Mr. Delafield.

"Excellent! superb! lovely! marvelous! That'll do first-rate!" exclaimed the "adjective man" enthusiastically. "I must write that down. We'll have you on the bills soon," he added, turning to Jack.

CHAPTER XVII

JACK MAKES A HIT

THAT afternoon's performance was well attended. Jack did the same thing he had done on the previous day and was moderately well applauded. As usual, however, Sam Kyle created the most laughter, for he had an act that was mirth-provoking, and he took advantage of various happenings in the ring to turn a joke or do some odd stunt that was sure to bring forth clapping.

Ted Chester, with his miniature automobile, made a hit also. The people seemed to like him, and this delighted Ted. He strutted about as "proud as a turkey just before Thanksgiving," as one of the other clowns put it.

"Mind you keep away from my side of the ring," cautioned Ted as he met Jack on the big circular track. "If I find you interfering with me again I'll take matters into my own hands. I don't care for Sam Kyle. If you bother with me and spoil my act, you've got to take the consequences."

"I'm not going to bother you," replied Jack.

"That's a hot act you have," went on Ted. "I wonder the old man lets you get away with it. What in the world people can find in that to laugh at I can't see. It's on the blink, I think."

Jack did not consider that any good would come of answering the mean clown, and he passed into the dressing-tent, as his turn was over for the afternoon. He encountered his friend Sam, who was washing up after the performance.

"I saw Ted talking to you," began the veteran clown. "Is he bothering you?"

"No—not much," replied Jack, determined to fight his own battles as far as he could.

"If he does, let me know, and I'll speak to the old man about him."

"Oh, I guess I can get along."

"All right, only you know I'll stand by you. Say, I've got a suggestion for you."

"What is it?"

"Why don't you make the paper-covered hoops you now use more in the shape of wings? You can easily do it, for the wood frame is light and not hard to bend."

"That's a good idea. I guess I will, until my regular machine is ready. I'll have that Monday or Tuesday, Mr. Delafield said."

"That's good. And say, while you're about it, why don't you color the wings? Get some paint

and daub 'em up so's they'll show off better. And you might get up a different sort of suit. I've got lots of material."

"Do you think it would be a good idea?"

"Sure. Change and variety is what we've got to give the public. Besides, the old man likes to see a change in the acts once in a while. Brighten things up a bit, and I think he'll appreciate it."

"I will," replied Jack, and that afternoon he made some paper affairs that looked more like wings than did the hoops, while he sewed some bright-colored patches on his white suit and made up to look like some grotesque bird.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Sam as he saw his protégé getting ready for the ring that night. "You've got the right knack, Jack. You'd ought to have been in this business before."

"I like it," said the runaway lad. "It just suits me, so far, though it hasn't been all easy sailing. But I sometimes think I've made a mistake. I should have stayed with the professor, for that's where the first news of my folks will come, and I'm getting worried about them. I'm afraid they may have been killed by the fanatical Chinese."

"Oh, I don't believe anything as bad as that has happened," replied Sam. "I read the papers every day, and while there are dispatches telling of trouble in China, no Americans have suffered."

"But the trouble is we can't seem to get any

trace of my folks," went on Jack. "The authorities don't know where they are, and how can they tell whether anything has happened to them or not?"

"Well, look on the bright side of things. That's my motto," answered the clown. "That's what we're for—to make people forget their troubles. Take a little of your own medicine, Jack."

"Yes, I guess that's a good idea. I'll try it. Only I wish I could hear some news of my folks. If I make any money this season I'll go to China and hunt for them."

"I guess you'll make some cash," went on the clown. "But that's our cue to enter the ring. Come on now, laugh and smile. A clown that looks as if he had lost his best friend isn't much use in a circus. Be happy!

"Hoop la!" he went on, as he ran from the dressing tent into the ring. "Oo la la! Tra-la-la! La-de-da!"

Then he turned a couple of handsprings, very nimbly, in spite of his age, and went on with his act, which, if roars of laughter indicated anything, must have pleased the audience.

Jack ran out with some of the other clowns, carrying a pair of his new paper wings. Other pairs, for he had made several that afternoon, were at different parts of the ring, ready for him, as he broke a pair each time he did his act.

There was an unusually large crowd present and every performer, feeling the stimulation of it, was doing his best. It seemed to Jack that he could do funnier capers than he had ever before attempted, and soon he had a goodly section of the assemblage laughing at his tricks with the imitation wings.

"Most merrily mirth-making," said Mr. Waddleton, the "adjective man," as he passed near Jack. "I'm watching you. I'm going to have your new act on the bills."

This encouraged the boy, and he went on with a vim, doing his odd dance, his big wings flapping out behind him.

"Ha! Hum! Not so bad. Not half bad!" remarked Mr. Paine, the manager, who, in accordance with his custom, was passing about the ring observing matters. "You're doing very well, Jack."

This made Jack forget, in a measure, his troubles—those caused by his life at the professor's house, and his flight from it, as well as those for which his enemies in the circus were responsible.

Jack felt a sense of happiness as he crawled into his bunk in the sleeping car that night, and he was becoming so used to the strange life that he did not lie awake very long. Before he knew it, morning came, and the show was at the next stop.

This was on Saturday, and, after a good day's business in a large country town, the circus started for Stewartsville, where it was to remain two days; Sunday, during which no performance would be given, and Monday, when the usual afternoon and evening exhibitions would take place.

Sunday was pretty much a day of rest with the circus folk. Of course the tents had to be put up in the morning, and the animals arranged in places. And the beasts had to be fed, and the performers, whose talents depended on their muscles or dexterity, did not forego their daily practice, to keep in condition. But, for the majority of the circus crowd, there was little to do.

Jack took advantage of the opportunity to go and look at the animals, for which he had very little time during the regular circus day. He was fond of wild beasts, and he made the acquaintance of some of the keepers. He was also introduced to the fat lady and the skeleton man, who were among the freaks in the side show. He found them both nice persons, and, in their turn, they seemed attracted to the boy, who, in spite of his unusually good luck in getting along so well as a newcomer, in the circus, was quite lonesome at times.

Toward the close of the afternoon Mr. Delafield called Jack into the property tent. The sight of a big object in the middle caused Jack to utter

an exclamation. There was his new flying machine, complete.

"That's fine!" he cried. "It will be ready for to-morrow, won't it?"

"I think so. The paint isn't quite dry, but it will be by morning."

The affair was gaudily colored, to match the suit which Jack had decided to wear. He could hardly wait for morning to try it, and, as soon as he had his breakfast, he took it into the main tent, where, with the help of the property man and Sam Kyle, he had his first rehearsal.

It worked fairly well, though it was found necessary to make one or two readjustments. But these were finished by afternoon, and Jack got ready for his first appearance in his new rôle, that of an eccentric, clownish airship inventor.

He was a little nervous as he took his apparatus with him out into the ring that afternoon, and set it down in a space in front of the reserved seats. Then, with an affair that looked like an air pump, he pretended to fill the muslin bag. All the while he assumed the part of a man who has just completed an aeroplane and is anxious to see how it will work.

"Oh, mamma! See the airship! See the airship!" cried a boy in the audience close to Jack. "Will he really fly, mamma?"

"I don't know, Bertie. Watch and see," replied the lady.

"I'm going to fly a little way, if I have luck," said Jack to himself.

The attention of a considerable portion of the crowd was now drawn to him. With a heart that beat faster than usual, he went on with his grotesque preparations. Then he hauled the machine, which was very light, up on the platform.

There was a laugh as he spread out the big umbrella. Then, pretending to peer up to the sky, as if in search of storm clouds, Jack took his place on the suspended seat. The affair was so arranged that he could walk in it to the edge of the platform before he leaped off.

He recited a funny little verse, composed for him by Mr. Waddleton, containing references to the various airship inventors then in the public eye, stood poised for a moment on the edge of the platform, and then, hoping that everything was all right, and that he would land safely, he leaped off.

Down, down, down he sailed, the big umbrella buoying him up like a parachute. He kicked vigorously with his feet, and the big wings flapped up and down. The crowd burst into loud laughter and there was hearty applause.

Lower and lower Jack sank down, falling gently to the ground. He ceased to work the wings, and then came the climax. He pulled a

string and there was a report like a small cannon, while the bag which was held apart with hoops and springs, collapsed, and the umbrella closed up with a snap. It looked exactly as if the imitation airship had blown up on reaching the ground, but this was only a trick Mr. Delafield had devised at the last moment.

My, what laughter and applause there was then! It was one of the oddest sights seen in the circus. Jack knew there was no doubt about it—he had made a hit.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROFESSOR KLOPPER APPEARS

"THAT'S the stuff!" cried Mr. Paine, running up to where Jack was getting out of the collapsed airship. This was the first the boy knew that the manager had been watching him. But there was very little that escaped the "old man." "You're doing good," the manager went on. "Quick, now, on the other side. The people there are wondering what it's all about. Here," he cried to several men, "help get this platform over by the box and press seats. This is a good stunt!"

Jack was proud and happy. Of course he had higher ambitions than being a circus clown, but while he was in that rôle he was going to do his best. Besides, he wanted to earn all the money he could, so that he might go and search for his father and mother, and he hoped that if he did well his salary might be increased.

"Do the same thing over here," said Mr. Paine. "Make it as funny as you can. It's a hit, all right.

Ha! Hum! It's not so bad! It's not so bad!" which was praise indeed from Mr. Paine.

Jack repeated his act, and was applauded louder than ever. Then he had to go to the far end of the tent, where the ordinary seats were. There he was well received, the final collapse of the aeroplane apparently affording the best amusement of all.

"Down at the other end now," ordered the manager, who seemed to be keeping an eye on Jack. Though the boy did not know it, managers of shows, whether they be circuses or theatrical performances, are always on the lookout for novelties, and they are only too willing to advance young players who show that they can stand out above the average, and gain the plaudits of the crowd, which is all, save the ticket receipts, that a manager usually cares about.

Just as Jack was getting up on his platform for his last airship performance, Ted Chester, who was creating some amusement by his antics with the miniature automobile, came along.

"You're not going to do your act here!" he exclaimed to Jack.

"Yes, I am," replied our hero boldly.

"I say you're not! I'm going to show here, and I'm not going to have you butting in. Clear out of here!"

"Mr. Paine sent me here."

"I don't care whether he did or not. I say I'm going to do my turn here, and you can't. You're always around bothering me, and I won't stand for it!"

"I'm going to do my act here," declared Jack. "I was told to by the manager."

"I don't care whether you were or not."

"Besides, the platform is erected here now," went on the young clown, "and the men have gone. I can't move it."

"Then cut your act out. You're not going to spoil mine."

"That's right. Make him quit," advised Mitz, the ringmaster, who had just finished putting several horses through their paces, and who was retiring to the dressing tent. "Make him quit the show," he added.

Jack looked at him apprehensively, but the ugly ringmaster had been taught a lesson. He did not flick his whip at the boy.

The young clown hesitated. He did not know whether to ignore Ted and go on with his act, or appeal to Mr. Paine, who was at the far side of the ring, making an announcement about a young woman who did a "loop the gap" act in an automobile.

But there was an unexpected diversion in Jack's favor. Sam Kyle, in his progress around the big ring, had seen that something was amiss. It was

his duty to settle disputes among the clowns, and he often had to do so, as, since these performers had no regular place for their acts, one frequently would appear in the same spot where a fellow-actor was showing off.

"What's the matter?" asked Sam, as he approached.

"He's butting in on me," replied Ted, in surly tones.

"That's what he is," added the ringmaster.

"This in none of your affair," declared Sam to the man in the dresssuit. "I think I can settle it. Go on with your act, Jack," he said.

"And spoil mine?" demanded Ted.

"You've already been on four times this afternoon," said the head clown. "I've been keeping watch of you. This will make your fifth act. Four's all you're allowed unless I say so, and I don't. Go on, Jack."

"But I——" began Ted.

"Cut it out," advised Sam. "I haven't time to listen to you, but let me tell you one thing, if you interfere again with Jack, and make trouble, I'll have you fired, that's what I'll do! And you know I'm a man of my word, and that I can do as I say," he added significantly. "Take your auto and get out of the ring. Jack has a good act, and he's entitled to the credit of it."

"I'll—I'll——" spluttered Ted, who was very angry.

"Don't you threaten me!" exclaimed Sam. "I've told you what to do, and I want you to do it!"

Ted had no choice but to obey, though he did it with no very good grace. Jack prepared for his act, while the ringmaster, who had been too busy before to notice, looked on sneeringly. He was a great chum of Ted, and for this reason, more than because he had any reason to dislike Jack, he had a grudge against our hero.

The airship act went off well, the applause at the last attempt being louder than any that had preceded it. Jack felt very proud.

He repeated his success that evening, and he was more than gratified when Mr. Paine, seeking him out at the close of the show, announced that his wages would be raised to fifteen dollars a week.

"I'll soon get to China at that rate," thought Jack, for, since he had to spend nothing for board, he could save nearly all his salary.

With practice, Jack became more proficient in odd little parts, until in about two weeks he was one of the best attractions of the ring. His act was mentioned on the bills, though he was given no name, for he had not yet arisen to be a star of that magnitude.

Meanwhile the circus was traveling about from

city to city, and Jack was becoming accustomed to the free and easy life, though it had its drawbacks, especially in a storm.

"Where do we show to-morrow?" asked the boy of Sam, one night when they were in the sleeping car.

"Northrup is the next stop."

"Northrup? That's not far from where I live —or used to live," he added, as he thought rather sadly that he had no real home now. "Maybe I'll see some of the boys from Westville," he went on.

Jack was strolling about the next morning, after a good breakfast, watching the men put up the big tent, an operation of which he never tired. There was the usual crowd of boys looking on, and our hero glanced among them for the possible sight of some one he might know. Often, when he was younger, he had gone from Westville to Northrup to see the circus come in. But he saw no familiar faces, and was turning to go back to the dressing tent, for it was nearly time to get ready for the street parade, when he was startled by hearing a voice ask of one of the canvasmen:

"Is this Bower & Brewster's circus?"

"Sure thing," replied the man shortly.

"Thank you, my man. I am looking for a certain person, and I heard he was with this show."

Jack's heart almost stopped beating. He knew that voice only too well. It was that of Professor

Klopper. And a guarded look at the man who had asked the question showed the boy that he was right.

Hidden behind a tent-pole wagon, Jack peered cautiously out, and beheld the figure of his former guardian, stern and forbidding, looking about him.

"He's after me," thought Jack. "What shall I do? I'll never let him arrest me. I must hide! No, I know a better plan than that," he added to himself. "I'll make up in my clown outfit. He'll never know me then, even if he does see me. But I'll take precious good care to keep out of his sight."

CHAPTER XIX

JACK'S TRICK

HURRYING to the dressing tent, but taking good care not to get within sight of the professor, Jack quickly donned his clown suit.

"What's up?" asked several of the other performers, who were lounging about, or going over their trunks. "It isn't time for the parade, is it?"

"Not exactly," replied Jack. "I just thought I'd get ready, though," for, though a number of the circus people knew something of his story, he did not think it wise to tell why he was going to dress up so early. "Ted Chester or the ringmaster would give me up to him as quick as a wink," thought our hero, "and I'm not going to submit to arrest now."

He went on with his make-up, and was daubing the red and white paint on his face when Sam Kyle came into the tent.

"Making up early, aren't you?" asked Sam, looking at his watch.

"A little," admitted Jack. "But I wanted to be

ready in time. Then I guess I'll practice some new stunts with my flying machine."

"Humph! You can practice a good deal better in your regular clothes than you can in that suit," remarked Sam.

But Jack gave no reason for his peculiar action. When he was all rigged out, ready to take his place on the wagon, or enter the ring, he ventured out of the tent.

"I wonder if the professor would know me if he saw me now," he thought. "Guess I'll walk about and see if I can catch sight of him. I'll have to be cautious, though."

He strolled about the circus grounds, attracting considerable attention from a number of small boys, for there were no other performers in sight so early in the morning. Jack walked about, keeping watch for the professor, and when he did not observe him he began to breathe easier. He was glad when the time came to get up on the wagon, and take his place among the clowns who played the odd musical instruments.

Just as the procession started from the circus grounds to parade through the streets, he caught sight of his guardian, hurrying along, and peering about anxiously through his big spectacles.

"He's looking for me," decided Jack. "Queer how he should be so vindictive. He must know I wouldn't steal his old cup. I wish he'd go back

home. It's no fun to fear every minute that you're going to be arrested."

To better screen himself from the professor's gaze, in case the elderly man should inspect the clown wagon too closely, our hero placed his trumpet to his lips, and began to blow. This was a signal for the other oddly attired performers to begin, and soon the wagon passed beyond where Mr. Klopper was standing.

"I'm safe for a while, anyhow," mused Jack. "It was a good thing I thought of this trick."

When the procession returned to the grounds most of the performers began to remove their suits, and the clowns washed the paint from their faces, as it would be some time before the afternoon performance would start.

Jack, however, remained in his clown suit, with the coloring matter still thick on his face.

"Going to stay that way until you get your cue?" asked a fellow clown.

"I—I guess so," replied Jack. "Might as well. It won't be long."

"Too long for me," was the reply. "I get enough of it as it is. No paint for mine until the last minute, and off it comes as soon as I'm through."

But Jack had a good reason for keeping his on. His own mother would not have known him in his present costume. To avoid the many questions of

the other performers, who could not understand the boy's action, Jack, after a hasty dinner, went into the main tent, which was now up, and pretended to be adjusting his imitation airship. He remained there until almost time for the afternoon show to start, and then he started back to the dressing tent to await the blast of the trumpets that summoned the company of clowns.

As he was coming out of the main tent he almost ran into a man who was standing on the outside, near the dressing rooms. Jack started back in surprise, for, as the man turned, he saw that he was none other than Professor Klopper.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed the former college teacher, "but I am looking for a friend of mine—a young lad—who, I understand, is with this circus. He ran away to join it, and I wish to find him about a very particular matter. Can you tell me where he is? His name is Jack Allen."

Jack almost stopped breathing. He could scarcely believe that the professor would not recognize him.

Not daring to trust his voice to make reply, and fearing the professor would know his tones, if he did not know his ward's face under the coating of paint, Jack shook his head to answer in the negative, and hurried on.

"One moment," exclaimed the professor. "Perhaps you——"

"I am looking for a friend of mine"

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But Jack, still vigorously shaking his head, passed into the tent. He knew the professor, nor any other outsider, would not be allowed to enter there.

"My, that was a close call!" exclaimed the youth to himself, as he applied a little more paint where it had been rubbed off as he brushed against a tent flap. "I'll put it on good and thick," he decided. "I can't take any chances. He'll be in the audience watching for me, sure."

He used more paint than he ever had before, and succeeded in securing a very comical effect, which added to his queer appearance.

His nervousness and fear did not prevent him from giving a good performance, and, as he went to the different parts of the ring, doing his turn with the airship, he looked anxiously among the throng to see if he could observe the professor. But it was impossible to pick out any particular individual in that big audience, and Jack felt safe, at least for the time being.

After the performance, instead of removing his costume and washing off the paint, he remained attired as he was in his clown outfit. His friends tried to find out why he kept it on all day, but he did not tell them.

"He's getting crazy, that's what's the matter with him," said Ted Chester, with a sneer. "He's

so stuck on his act that he thinks all the people are looking at him."

"That's usually the way you are," commented Sam Kyle. "You can't throw any stones, Ted."

"Aw, who's talking to you?" demanded Ted, in surly tones.

But in spite of the many questions asked him, as to his reason, Jack kept his suit on. Nor did he go out of the dressing tent any more than he had to, for he thought the professor might be strolling about looking for him.

Whether or not his former guardian was on the lookout that afternoon and evening, Jack did not then find out. His one fear was lest the professor should go to the manager of the circus and make inquiries, for, in that event, the runaway boy would have been discovered. But Mr. Klopper evidently did not think of that, and when the show was over that night, and Jack found he had not been detected, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, I should think you'd be glad to get those togs off," remarked Sam, when Jack resumed his regular clothes, and started for the train.

"I am," was the answer, but Jack said nothing more, and Sam wondered what was coming over his protégé.

But if Jack had only known what the professor had to tell him, how willingly would the boy have

revealed himself! Mr. Klopper had come to the circus, not only to find our hero, but also to impart some valuable information. But now the news was lost to the boy.

CHAPTER XX

A TREACHEROUS ACT

For several weeks after this the circus traveled about from city to city, sometimes taking in large towns, and gradually working through the middle west, spending considerable time in Ohio and Indiana. Jack was beginning to like the life more and more, in spite of the hard work, for, though there was plenty of fun connected with it, there was also no lack of hardships.

He continued to improve in his act and had received another raise of salary, now getting eighteen dollars a week, which was as much as some of the other clowns earned.

Jack was careful with his money, and, at Sam's suggestion, left most of it with the treasurer of the show. For there were many temptations to spend money when on the road, and Jack had more than once declined to gamble or spend his cash for drinks or cigars.

"I never saw such a tight-wad as you are," said Ted Chester one day, when he had invited Jack to

enter a card game with him. "Why don't you loosen up a bit?"

"I don't care to waste my money gambling," replied Jack. "I've got a better use for it. Why don't you play with some of the other fellows?"

"Because they're sports, and they've spent all their money until next salary day."

The truth was, though, that few of the circus folk liked to play with Ted, who had a reputation of cheating when he got the chance. He and Mitz were generally together, seeking to get some one interested in a card game, and it was whispered that they acted as partners in fleecing the unwary ones who played with them.

But Jack had been warned by his friend, Sam Kyle, to have nothing to do with any card games, and not to drink or smoke. He would probably not have done so anyhow, as the boy had the advantage of excellent home training; but temptation is sometimes very strong, and Sam did not want to see his protégé get into bad habits.

"There's nothing in this sporting life—drinking, smoking, and gambling," said Sam. "I've done my share of it, and I know what I'm talking about. It's fun for a while, but you have to pay a dear price for it.

"I used to squander my money that way, but an old man gave me some good advice in time, and I

quit. Now I'm saving up for the time when I get too old to amuse folks any longer."

"And I'm saving up to try and find my folks," said Jack.

"Haven't you had any word from them?"

"Not a word since I ran away. I don't suppose I could have received any, traveling about as we do. Sometimes I wish I had stayed with the professor. He was real mean to me, and would have had me arrested. But even then I might have heard some word from my father or mother. Now I'm not likely to unless I can get to China, or unless I go back to the professor."

"I'd advise you to do the last," said Sam. "It's a long way to China, and I doubt if you could do much, or find out much, after you got there. Go back to the professor."

"But he'll have me arrested. I don't want to be locked up for something I didn't do."

"I don't blame you for that. But wait a while. There's no need to go back right away. Finish out the season with us, if you like. I know the old man would hate to lose you now."

"I want to stay, too," said Jack. "I'm getting to like the life very much."

"Well, then, stick it out till fall. Then write to the professor, asking for news of your folks. He'll give you some, if he has it, even though he wants to arrest you. But perhaps by then he'll get

over his anger, or maybe he'll find, in the meanwhile, that you didn't steal the cup. Anyway, you can write to him, and promise to return, if he will not have you locked up, until you have a chance to prove that you're innocent. That's what I'd do."

"I guess I will," decided Jack. "I'll write to him when it's about time for the circus to close up."

"That won't be for a couple of months yet," said Sam. "Maybe you'd better write now."

"No, if I do, very likely he'd find out where I was and have me locked up. I'll wait a while."

But if Jack had only written then he would have saved himself much anguish of heart, and not a little physical suffering. But he did not know, not being able to look into the future.

One day, after he had finished his performance in the ring, Jack went to the property man.

"I wish I could have my platform made a little higher," he said.

"What for?"

"Well, there isn't much chance for the air to get under the umbrella when I jump off now. If I made a higher leap I could work the wings a little better, for I'd be in the air longer. Can you raise the platform?"

"I guess so. How much?"

"About ten feet."

"But that will make it nearly forty feet for you to jump. Won't that be rather dangerous?"

"I guess not. You see, the umbrella is a big one, and once it gets a lot of air under it, I'm held up, and I'll come down slowly. Besides, it will make a better act. I can make it look more as if I was really flying."

"All right, I'll do it. Did you ask Mr. Paine?"

"Yes; and he said it would be all right. He likes the idea."

"Mr. Waddleton will have to get some new adjectives to put on the bills about you," remarked the property man, with a laugh. "He thinks you're quite an attraction. You've got Ted and some of the other clowns jealous. They're at me all the while to get them up something so they can make a hit."

"Well, there's nothing to stop them," declared Jack. "I don't care how many queer stunts they do."

"Me either; only I'm not going to think 'em out for 'em and then make 'em. I told 'em I'd make 'em if they'd tell me what they wanted, but they haven't got brains enough to do that. They make me tired!" and the property man went on with his work of patching up a big sea serpent that one of the clowns used in an act. "I'll make that platform higher for you to-morrow," he said to Jack;

"only you want to be careful how you jump off from such a height."

"I will," said the young clown, and then he went into the tent to rest until the evening performance, for he was rather tired, as he had responded to several encores that afternoon.

The platform, made ten feet higher, was ready for him the next day, when they opened in a good-sized city in Indiana. He got his flying machine in readiness, and it was carted out by a couple of the ring hands, for since Jack had made such a success he was given more attention by the manager, who detailed two men to help the lad, since the apparatus was now quite bulky to move about, though it was very light. Jack had made one or two changes in it, and had rigged up some United States flags on the top of the umbrella, the emblems being suddenly displayed by the pulling of a string as he began to sail downward.

"Now, Jack," said Sam Kyle, as the clowns ran out of the dressing tent, in response to the trumpet signal, "let's see how your improvement works. I expect you'll sail all about the tent now."

"Hardly; but I can give a better exhibition, I think."

He climbed up to the top of the slender platform. Then, after his usual song and dance, he prepared to take his place on the seat of the flying machine. First, however, as was his custom, he

carefully examined the umbrella, for it was on this he relied to save him from the effects of his high jump, the big Japanese affair acting as does a parachute when a man leaps from a balloon.

Something about some of the ribs attracted the boy's attention. He looked more carefully. To his horror, he saw that nearly all of them had been cut through so that when he jumped the umbrella would collapse, and let him fall to the ground with such a suddenness that he would be seriously hurt, if not killed. For a moment the terror of his discovery of the treacherous act deprived him of the ability to move or speak.

"Some one did this so I'd get hurt," he whispered. "I wonder who it could have been?"

Yet he at once thought of Ted Chester and his crony, the ringmaster.

"What shall I do?" thought Jack. "I can't go on with the act with this umbrella."

He stood on the platform, undecided what to do. The crowds, which had heard of his act, were impatiently calling for him to leap.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Paine, running to the foot of the platform. He had seen from the other side of the ring that something was wrong.

"My umbrella ribs have been cut," replied Jack. "I can't jump with it this way."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the manager. "That's

a mean trick! I'll look into this. But wait. Haven't you a spare umbrella somewhere?"

"Yes, several of them."

"All right. Come down. I'll send for Delafield to help you rig up another one. In the meantime I'll send Sam Kyle over here to jolly the crowd along until you're ready. He'll say you have to fix up your airship, because one built by the German government tried to destroy it last night. And say nothing about the umbrella until you hear from me. Quick, now, get down."

Thus did the quick-witted manager save the situation. Jack descended, and soon, with Mr. Delafield's aid, he was attaching another umbrella to the airship. Several had been supplied, in case one might be damaged, and so little time was lost, though the two flags could not be attached.

Meanwhile Sam Kyle mounted to the platform, and was keeping the crowd in roars of laughter by his antics. As soon as Jack was ready he came down, and our hero took his accustomed place.

Once more he carefully examined the umbrella before venturing on his flight. This caution had been impressed on him by Sam, and some of his other friends. None of the performers who had to do their acts high in the air, they said, would go on a trapeze, bar or rope without first testing it. For, not only were accidents likely to occur, but often vindictive rivals would cut a rope partly

through, with the hope of maiming their more successful fellows.

But this new umbrella was strong, and Jack made ready for his leap. It was with more fear than he had known since he had perfected his act that he got astride the swaying seat, and, holding to the umbrella handle, launched himself from the platform, his feet working the big wings as fast as they would flap.

To his delight, his new plan worked to perfection. The air, having more of a chance to get under the umbrella, buoyed him up considerably better, and he sailed gracefully to the ground, the flight taking several seconds longer. The chief drawback to it formerly had been that it was over too quick. Now this objection had been removed.

Then Jack pulled the cord which fired the shot, and the ship seemed to fly apart, the umbrella closing down and the bag collapsing. There was hearty applause for the young clown, but through it all Jack was wondering at the motive of those who had so nearly caused a serious accident.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MONKEYS ESCAPE

WHEN the afternoon performance came to an end, Mr. Paine sent for Jack. He closely questioned the boy about the cut umbrella. Jack could throw no light on when it had been done.

"Whom do you suspect did it?" asked the manager.

"I—I don't know," replied Jack.

"Yes, you do. You have some idea. Who's got a grudge against you?"

"Well, I suppose Ted Chester has, though I never did anything to him."

"Who else?"

"Well, Mr. Mitz was rather mean to me."

"Ha! Hum! I begin to understand something. You may tell Mr. Delafield I want him."

Jack summoned the property man, and the manager closely questioned him as to whether he had seen any one about the airship just before the performance began, for it had been proved that the apparatus was in perfect order that morning.

"I didn't see any one interfering with it," replied Mr. Delafield.

"Were you in the property tent all the while?"

"Yes—that is, nearly."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, Mitz called me out to see about making a new tub for the baby elephant to stand on."

"How long were you gone?"

"About ten minutes."

"Ha! Hum! That would be time enough. I think I see how this was done. Mitz and Chester put up the game, and a mean one it was. While Mitz got you out, Chester slipped in and cut the umbrella. Say nothing about it, however. I'll have a talk with them. I'll put a stop to this business."

What the result was of the manager's talk to the mean clown and his crony, the ringmaster, Jack never heard. Evidently there was not proof enough to make certain the guilt of either of the two men, though when they came from the manager's tent they looked worried and uneasy.

The affair resulted in one thing that benefited Jack, however, for, after that, neither the clown nor Mitz bothered him, though Ted Chester said mean things to his young rival every chance he got.

After that Jack was more than usually careful to look to all the ropes and other strengthening devices on the airship, as well as to the umbrella; for

leaping off from such a height as he did it would not take much to cause him to take a terrible tumble.

The circus played a number of one-day stands through the lower part of Ohio, and then swinging around in a big circle, began to work back east. As the larger cities were reached they stayed longer in one place, in some remaining a week, which gave the performers and animals a chance to get a good rest.

Meanwhile, Jack had heard nothing more from the professor, nor about the efforts to cause an arrest for the theft of the gold cup. The young clown kept a wary eye out for the sight of a policeman who might be looking for him, and he was also on his guard against meeting Mr. Klopper.

But he need not have worried. The professor, after his one attempt to locate Jack, gave it up personally, though he tried other means to find the boy, for, as before stated, he had something very important to tell our hero.

The circus reached a town in western Pennsylvania one morning during quite a heavy storm. It had been raining off and on for a week, and the temper of all the employes and performers was tried by the unpleasant weather. A circus is quite a miserable place in the rain, for the usual crowds do not turn out, and everything seems to go wrong.

"I hope it clears up by this afternoon," said Sam

Kyle gloomily, as he left the breakfast tent, which leaked in places, and, with Jack, and some of the other clowns, looked up at the dull sky. "I'm sick of being wet through."

The show had to go on, rain or shine, however, and the parade usually took place no matter how hard it stormed. This was very unpleasant for the performers, especially the clowns, as the paint would persist in running off their faces, giving them a streaked and bedraggled appearance, which, while it added to their funny aspect, was not just what they wanted.

"It looks as if it might clear," said Jack hopefully. "The wind seems to be shifting."

But it was raining when the parade started, and Jack and his fellow clowns were wet and cold riding on top of the open wagon, playing their battered instruments.

Now, whether the rain was the cause for what happened when the procession reached the middle of the town, where quite a crowd had gathered to view it, or whether the little beasts managed to break open the door, was not disclosed. At any rate, just as the parade was turning back to the grounds, the cage containing the monkeys suddenly opened.

Jack was the first to notice it, for the clowns' wagon was right behind that containing the long-tailed creatures. He saw several of the monkeys

leaping out of the opened door, and swinging themselves up on top.

"The monkeys! The monkeys!" he cried. "They're getting loose!"

"They're already loose," observed Sam grimly. "Now there'll be some fun. They're the hardest of all animals to catch, once they get out."

Shouts and laughter from the crowd, which, now that there was more than the usual excitement, did not seem to mind the rain, told the man driving the monkey wagon that something was wrong. But he hardly needed this warning, for, a moment later, one of the mischievous simians snatched off the driver's hat, and clapped it on its own queer head. Another monkey grabbed it from the first one, and soon the whole troop was on top of the wagon fighting and chattering over the possession of the hat.

The driver wound the reins about his whip, and scrambled up on top of the vehicle in a desperate endeavor to capture some of the nimble animals. But, no sooner did they see him coming than, with one accord, they scrambled down the sides of the wagon, reached the ground, and, rejoicing in their new-found freedom, scattered about the street.

"Come on, boys!" cried Sam. "Those monkeys are valuable. We'll have to help catch 'em."

"Let the animal men look after 'em," said Ted Chester.

"The boss will appreciate it if we help," remarked the head clown. "Come on, boys."

Jack and the other clowns dropping their battered instruments, climbed down from the high wagon, which had come to a stop, and began running after the monkeys. But the mischievous beasts had scattered among the crowd now.

Yells of laughter from the men lining the roadway, mingling with the frightened screams of women and children, told that the monkeys were creating plenty of excitement.

"Grab 'em, folks! Grab 'em!" cried Sam to the crowd.

"I'd like to see myself," objected a fat woman. "One of the ugly beasts tore my best bonnet to pieces. I'm going to sue the circus!"

Just then a shout caused Jack to look where several men were pointing. He saw a monkey perched up on top of a store awning, tearing to pieces something that looked like a bouquet of many-colored flowers.

"My bonnet! Oh, my bonnet!" yelled the fat woman. "There's the ugly beast, now, tearing my bonnet to pieces, and it cost three dollars!"

Yells from other women in the crowd indicated that they, too, feared the same thing that had happened to the fat lady. Nor were they far wrong. The monkeys seemed to be attracted by the gay headwear of the women in the crowd, and soon

there was presented the odd sight of half a dozen of the creatures, perched up on high vantage points, tearing to pieces the flowered and ribboned hats, and scattering the pieces to the ground.

"Help! Help!" suddenly cried a man. "One of 'em's trying to choke me!"

Jack ran to where he heard the cry. Perched upon a man's back was a monkey—a small one.

"Take him away! Take him away!" yelled the man. "He's choking me to death!"

The simian had one arm around the man's neck, but it was not trying to choke him. Instead, the odd little creature was trying to reach a bright-red balloon, one of the small kind sold when the circus comes to town. The man had bought it for his little girl.

"Give him the balloon!" cried the crowd, delighted at the antics of the monkeys.

"No, no, daddy! It's mine! Get the monkey for me, too," cried the little girl.

"Stand still a minute!" called Jack. "I'll catch the monkey."

He hurried up to the man, and grabbed the hairy little brute. The monkey tried to get away, but Jack held it tight, and soon had carried it back to the cage, having caught the first one of the runaways.

"That's the way to do it," said the man in

charge of the monkey wagon. "The old man will have a fit if we lose any."

Jack ran back to try and capture some more. It was an odd sight to see the queerly-dressed clowns, with the paint on their faces running into all sorts of streaks, darting through the crowd after the monkeys. The excitement among the women continued, and several bonnets had been ruined.

Some of the men in the throng now turned in to help, and five or six of the long-tailed beasts were caught. Jack captured another, and some of the other clowns managed to grab the nimble creatures as they scampered about.

In about ten minutes half of the number in the cage had been caught. The others—the large ones—had climbed to high points of the buildings along the street, where they chattered away, as if defying the men to get them.

"I'll bring 'em back," said the man who had charge of them. He went into a store, and purchased some apples, peanuts and candy. These things he gave to the recaptured monkeys in the cage, and the cries they set up as they fought over the possession of the dainties, attracted the others, who, anxious not to miss the feast, came trooping along, only too glad to submit to being captured, if only they could get something to eat.

"Whew! That was a strenuous time," panted Jack, as he took his place again on the wagon with

his fellow clowns. "That was as good as part of the circus."

"Yes, the crowd got its money's worth," replied Sam. "I suppose the old man will have to pay damages for those hats, however."

CHAPTER XXII

IN A STORM

ONCE more the parade started, and it completed the circuit without further accident. To the delight of every one, the rain ceased, and the sun came out to dry off dripping tents, and drive away the moisture from the soaked ground.

"We'll have a fine crowd out this afternoon and to-night, I think," said Sam. "This is always a good town to show in."

Events proved that he was right, and when it came time for the afternoon performance the big tent was taxed to its capacity to hold the throng gathered. All the performers seemed to have new vim and vigor with the advent of better weather, and the acts went off with a snap that had been absent during the wet spell.

"Now, Jack, show 'em what you can do," advised Sam Kyle, as it came the turn of the clowns to enter the ring. "Make a good flight."

Jack excelled himself, for he had added a new turn to his stunt, and this was the first time he tried

it. This was to take with him, in a cage concealed on top of the muslin bag, a tame rooster that belonged to one of the clowns, who had temporarily given up using it, as he had a new act.

Chanticleer was put in a cage, and the sides of it were covered with white muslin, arranged on a frame work so that they would fall down when a spring was released, revealing the rooster on top of the airship. Until the sides fell down, however, it merely looked like a small square box on top of the distended muslin bag. Jack could bring the rooster into view by pulling on a cord.

Jack's act was getting to be quite complicated. In addition to jumping off a high platform, he had to operate the wings of his machine with his feet, and just as he reached the ground he had to pull a cord that shot off a blank cartridge and allowed the balloon to seemingly fall apart, yank another that displayed the two United States flags, and now there was a third one, that would release the rooster.

The bird had been trained to fly, flap its wings and crow as soon as the sides of its cage fell, and Jack counted on making quite a hit this time.

He succeeded. Everything went off well, from the time he jumped with his apparatus off the tower platform until he shot off the cartridge, unfurling the flags and revealing the rooster, who

added not a little to the novelty of the act by crowing most vigorously.

"Ha! Hum! Not so bad! Not so bad! Not half bad!" was all Mr. Paine said, when he saw Jack's latest performance; but the young clown knew that was the highest praise the manager ever bestowed.

"If it goes off as well to-night as it did this afternoon, you'll get two dollars more a week," went on Mr. Paine. "I like my clowns to think up new things. It's a wonder some of you fellows wouldn't put a little more ginger into your work," the manager continued to Jack's fellow workers. "Some of you are all right, but unless the rest of you wake up, you'll be looking for other jobs soon."

He walked away, and several of the clowns murmured among themselves. The majority, however, knew they were all right, for they were continually improving their acts.

"This is what comes of letting a fresh young kid get in among older performers," said Ted Chester. "I'm going to quit soon if he don't. He gets all the attention."

"That's right," added two or three others. "The manager thinks he's the whole show."

"If we could queer his act some way maybe it would take him down a peg," suggested a tall,

lanky clown, whose specialty was to lead an educated pig around the ring.

"Say, I've got an idea," whispered Ted. "Come over here, you fellows."

The dissatisfied ones were soon whispering among themselves, but whenever any one came near them they seemed to be discussing the most ordinary topics.

That night when Jack went to get his apparatus ready for his performance, he could not find the trained rooster, that was kept in a cage in a small tent with other animals used by the clowns.

"Have you seen Pippo?" Jack asked the clown who had loaned him the bird.

"Seen Pippo? Why, no. I told you to take care of him. I hope he isn't lost."

"I put him in his cage, in here, just as you told me to, after the performance this afternoon," replied Jack. "Now he's gone."

"Yes, and the lock on the cage has been broken off," declared the clown, when he had examined the small box, which was kept locked between performances. "I must tell Mr. Paine."

The manager was wrathful when informed of what had happened.

"There's some queer game going on in this show," he exclaimed. "If I find out who's responsible I'll discharge him at once. Look around, Jack, and have some of the men help you. That's

a good part of the act, and I don't want it spotled. Maybe some one hid the rooster for a joke, though it won't be very funny for him if I find out who it was."

Careful search was made for the rooster, but it was not to be found. It was getting close to the time of the performance when the living skeleton came in from the freak tent.

"Where's the old man?" he asked Jack, as Mr. Paine had gone to another part of the dressing tent.

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because the fat lady has kicked up a row, and she says she won't go on exhibition. That'll queer the show."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Jack, not caring particularly, however, as he was anxious about his own act.

"Why, there's a rooster under the raised platform she sits on, and she's superstitious about roosters. She's afraid she'll have bad luck."

"A rooster!" cried Jack. "I'll get it! I'll bet it's the one I'm looking for!"

He ran to the freak tent, the inmates of which knew nothing of the missing rooster. Lifting up the canvas side of the raised platform, upon which sat Madam Rosallie del Norto (stage name, her real one being Mrs. Susan McGinness), Jack saw the missing bird. No sooner was the canvas flap

raised than the rooster began to crow. Doubtless it imagined it was in the regular cage on top of the airship, and was waiting for the falling of the sides.

"Some one stole him out of the cage, and hid him here," thought Jack, "and I believe I know who did it. Well, I haven't time to do any investigating now, for I must get ready for my act. But I'll tell Mr. Paine afterward."

Jack did not get a chance to inform the manager, however, for that night after his act, which went off successfully, there were hurried preparations for departure, as there was every indication of another storm.

The performance was cut short, Mr. Paine going about the ring, urging the performers to hasten their acts. Jack only did his turn three times, instead of four.

"There's a big thunder storm coming up," explained the manager, "and I want to get the people out of the tent before it breaks. I'm going to cut out the final concert."

But, try as he did, the performance took some time, and when he gave orders to omit the chariot and other races, there was such objection from the crowd that he was forced to put them on.

The menagerie tent had been struck, the canvas and poles being loaded into wagons, and the vehicles started toward the train. There only re-

mained up the big tent, and as fast as the performers finished they packed their costumes in trunks, which were carted away.

"Well, we're done," said Sam to Jack, as the clowns finished their turns. "Let's pack up and get into the car. It's going to be a bad storm."

"I thought we had had enough rain," observed the boy.

"So did I, but you never can tell much about the weather this time of year."

They donned their regular clothes, and, having packed their trunks, went outside of the dressing tent. As they did so the whole western sky seemed to burst into a sheet of flame. At the same time there was a loud clap of thunder.

"Here it comes!" cried Sam. "Let's get inside the tent."

No sooner had they gotten under the shelter of the big canvas than the rain came down in torrents. The storm suddenly broke in all its fury.

There was incessant lightning, and the thunder was terribly loud. The wind swayed the big stretch of tent, and women began to scream in fright.

"There'll be a panic in a minute," said Sam, looking rather alarmed. "I guess this will end the show."

It did, for no one cared to look at the races while such a storm was in progress. The crowd began

leaving, and men, at the direction of Mr. Paine and his assistants, began taking up the board seats, the rattle and bang of the planks adding to the din and confusion.

The race horses were hurried out of the tent, so that if the people made a rush the animals would not get frightened and break loose among them.

Suddenly there came a terrific gust of wind. Some of the smaller tent poles began swaying dangerously, for there was a terrible strain on them.

"The tent's falling down!" cried a foolish man. "Run, everybody!"

Scores of women screamed, and one or two fainted. Then that seemed to become epidemic, and more women fell backward, pale and trembling.

"It's all right! It's all right!" cried Mr. Paine, trying to quiet the hysterical ones. "There's no danger! The tent will not fall!"

But his words had no effect. Louder sounded the thunder, and faster fell the rain. The tent seemed swaying more and more, and one of the smaller and unimportant poles snapping in two caused a panic-stricken rush of people from its vicinity.

"They're rushing right against the side of the tent!" cried Sam. "There's no way to get out there, as it's against a high bank! There'll be a lot of women trampled under foot!"

"Why doesn't the band play and quiet the rush?" asked Jack, who had read of such things being done in theatres when there was a fire panic.

"That's the stuff!" cried Sam. "Good idea! Come on, we'll get over to the band-stand and tell the leader to strike up a tune. Come on!"

He grasped Jack by the arm and half led, half dragged him through the press of people, who, every second, were becoming more and more unmanageable.

"Sit down! Stand still! There's no danger!" cried Mr. Paine, but all in vain. No one paid any attention to him. He even began pushing the people back, to prevent the rush against the bank of which Sam had spoken. He was only shoved to one side. The crowd wanted to get out, and that in the quickest manner possible.

Just as Jack and Sam got near where the band was stationed (for the musicians had kept their places), one of the big centre poles began to sway.

"That's going to fall," said Jack, in a low voice, to the head clown. "It'll kill a lot of people if it does!"

"Play! Play!" cried Sam frantically. "Play for all you're worth, fellows! It's the only way to stop the rush!"

The band leader comprehended. He gave a signal and the men, who were rather alarmed at

the signs of panic all about them, placed their instruments in position.

Jack, with horror-stricken eyes, watched the swaying pole. Others were also looking at it. One man set up a hoarse shout, and more women screamed. Then, just as the band struck up a lively air, Jack saw Ike Landon, the boss canvasman, and several of his helpers spring from the centre of the middle ring toward the swaying pole. Would he be able to catch the slipping ropes in time, and hold them? The lives of many depended on him now.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAD ELEPHANT

BUT Ike was equal to the emergency. With one motion, he had leaped to the foot of the swaying pole, which held up a great weight of wet canvas, and he had grabbed the rope which had slipped on account of the manner in which the tent swayed.

"Come on, you fellows!" yelled Ike to his men.

They came with a rush. The rope was slipping from the grasp of the head canvasman, but with the aid of his sturdy helpers he managed to hold it. They took a turn about a tent stake driven deep into the ground, and the fallen pole was held in place.

"That was a close call," whispered Sam to Jack.

The boy clown nodded. He had had a glimpse of the dangers that beset a circus, and he had no liking for them. Only by a narrow margin had a terrible tragedy been averted.

But now the band was playing. The crowd, that had seen the masterful manner in which Ike saved the pole from falling, was becoming quieter. The

panic was dying away, though the storm was now fiercer than ever. The big tent withstood the blast, however, and the maddened throng, being turned back from rushing at the steep bank, swerved around and poured out of the main entrance and into the driving rain.

"Those who wish to remain until after the shower is over may do so!" shouted Mr. Paine, when the band had done playing. "We will not take the tent down for some time yet."

There were cries of thanks from many who had no liking for going out and getting drenched. Many did go, however, for they lived at a distance and wanted to get home. Others, more nervous, still had some fear that the tent would fall.

"We can't do much in this storm, anyhow," said the manager to some of his men, who had gathered near him. "Get the seats out of the way, and we'll take the tent down as soon as it stops blowing. The other stuff can go, and we'll hold a few cars for the canvas and rush it through on an extra."

Half an hour later the storm had practically ceased, and then came the hard work of taking down a wet tent. You boys who have gone camping, and been obliged to handle your small tent when it was soaking wet, have some idea what it means to handle tons of damp canvas. Yet the circus men went at it as if it was the easiest thing in the world, and to such a system had they reduced

the work that the tent was down in a short time, and packed in wagons, ready to run on the flat cars.

Jack and Sam, when they saw that the danger was over, had gone to the train, and, with the other performers, were soon being whirled to the next town where the show was to give an exhibition.

"Well, this is something like weather," remarked Sam the next morning, as he peered out of the sleeping car window. The sun was shining brightly and the air was soft and warm. There was scarcely a trace of yesterday's storm, though this town was but thirty miles from the one where the tent had so nearly fallen.

"I dreamed I was being smothered under a lot of canvas coverings," said Jack.

"I nearly was, once," declared Sam simply.

"How?"

"Just like last night. Tent blew down in a tornado, and the whole show, and a big crowd, was caught. Pole hit me on the head, and I lay there unconscious and slowly smothering. They got me out in time, but fifteen people were killed."

"This is a more dangerous life than I thought," mused Jack.

"Dangerous? I guess it is. Folks on the outside don't know anything about it. They think being in a circus is fun. I wish some of them had about six months of it."

The performances that afternoon and evening

went off well, and for a week after that the circus played in good weather. The show was gradually working back east, and as there had been big crowds, and no mishaps to speak of, every one was in good humor.

Jack had no further trouble with the ugly ringmaster and Ted Chester, and his act was now looked upon as one of the most "drawing" features of the show. Mr. Paine promised the lad if he would stay with him the next season that he would pay our hero twenty-five dollars a week.

Jack did not know what to do. He had quite a sum saved up, but not enough to go to China with, and yet he desired to go and seek his parents. He disliked to do as Sam had suggested, and appeal to the professor, although he felt that it might be the best plan. If no news had been received from China, Jack made up his mind he would remain with the circus for another summer, but there was one difficulty in the way.

The show had no winter season, and Jack would be out of a job until next spring. He would have to live in the meantime, and, unless he could get a place in some theatre, which was doubtful, all his savings might go to support him while the show was in winter quarters. It was a harder problem to solve than he had any idea of, and he decided he would talk with Sam about it.

"That's what I'll do," Jack decided one day

after the afternoon performance had come to a close. "I'll ask him what he would do."

Sam was not in the dressing tent, and on inquiring where he was Jack was told that his friend was in the animal tent talking to one of the trainers. Thither the boy clown went.

As he passed the roped-off enclosure where the elephants were chained to heavy stakes, Jack saw Bill Henyon, the trainer of the huge beasts, rather carefully regarding Ajax, the largest tusker in the herd.

"Going to put him through some new tricks, Mr. Henyon?" asked Jack, for he had made friends with the elephant trainer. The man shook his head.

"Something's wrong with Ajax," he said. "I don't like the way he's acting. He's ugly with me, and he never was that way before. I'm afraid I'm going to have trouble. He acts to me as if he was going to have a mad spell."

"Do elephants get mad?" asked Jack.

"Well, not in the way dogs do, but there comes a certain time when they get off their feed, or when they have distemper or something like that, and then they go off in a rage, destroying everything they come up against. When an elephant gets that way in the wild state they call him a 'rogue,' and even the best hunters steer clear of him. He's a solitary brute, that kills for the love of killing."

"Do you think Ajax will get that way?"

"I hope not, yet I don't like the way he's behaving. I think I'll double shackle him."

Jack passed on, glad that it was not his duty to take charge of the big ungainly brutes. Mr. Henyon proceeded to fasten Ajax to the ground with heavy chains about the animal's feet.

"Now if you want to go off on a tantrum, you'll have hard work getting away," remarked the elephant man.

Ajax looked at his keeper with his wicked little eyes, and, lifting up his trunk, gave a shrill trumpet. Nor was the animal trainer's mind made any more easy as he noticed that Ajax was not doing his accustomed swaying motion, which all those big beasts, at least in captivity, seem to be always doing. Clearly something was wrong with Ajax.

Jack found Sam, and had a long talk with his friend. The head clown again advised the boy to write to the professor, and see if any news had come from the boy's folks.

"If they're still somewhere in China," said Sam, "you had better stick with the show. Maybe I can help you get a place in some theatre this winter."

"All right, I'll do as you say," agreed Jack. "I'll write to-morrow. But now I've got to go and fix some things on my airship. I broke a hoop in the bag this afternoon."

Jack started for the property tent, and he had

scarcely reached it when, from the menagerie, there came such a terrifying yell, mingled with a trumpet of rage, that every one who heard it stood still in horror.

"That's an elephant!" cried Mr. Delafield. "Something's gone wrong!"

"Ajax! It must be Ajax!" shouted Jack. "Bill told me he was acting queer a while ago!"

"Then he's killed some one," exclaimed the property man, as he rushed from his tent. "I know that yell. I heard one like it once before! Ajax has killed a man!"

Jack ran out of the tent after Mr. Delafield. As he got outside he heard the shrill trumpet again. Then came a rattle of chains, and a side of the animal tent bulged out.

"Ajax's loose! Ajax's loose!" cried a man, and the next instant the mad elephant, which had broken the double chains, rushed from the tent, trunk in the air, trumpeting shrilly, its wicked little eyes agleam with rage.

CHAPTER XXIV

JACK'S BAD FALL

BEHIND the big brute came a score of the animal men, armed with clubs, pitchforks, iron bars and elephant hooks. But Bill Henyon was not among them. The elephant trainer—the master of Ajax—had given that big brute his last command, for, as they ran, the men from the animal tent told how the elephant had seized Henyon in his trunk, and dashed him to the ground, maiming him so terribly that he was a cripple for life.

But now every man who could be spared from the circus grounds started to race after the fleeing elephant. Canvasmen, drivers, trainers, even the trapeze performers, joined in the hunt, and of course Jack, Sam, and several of the other clowns were there.

"If he runs toward town he'll do a lot of damage, and maybe kill two or three people before his rage dies down," said Sam.

"Can't they catch him in time?" asked Jack.

"It's a hard question. There, he's heading for the creek. Maybe that'll cool him off."

The circus tents had been pitched near a small stream, and toward this the big brute was now headed, for, heavy as an elephant is, he can outrun a man for a short distance, and sometimes beat him in a long race.

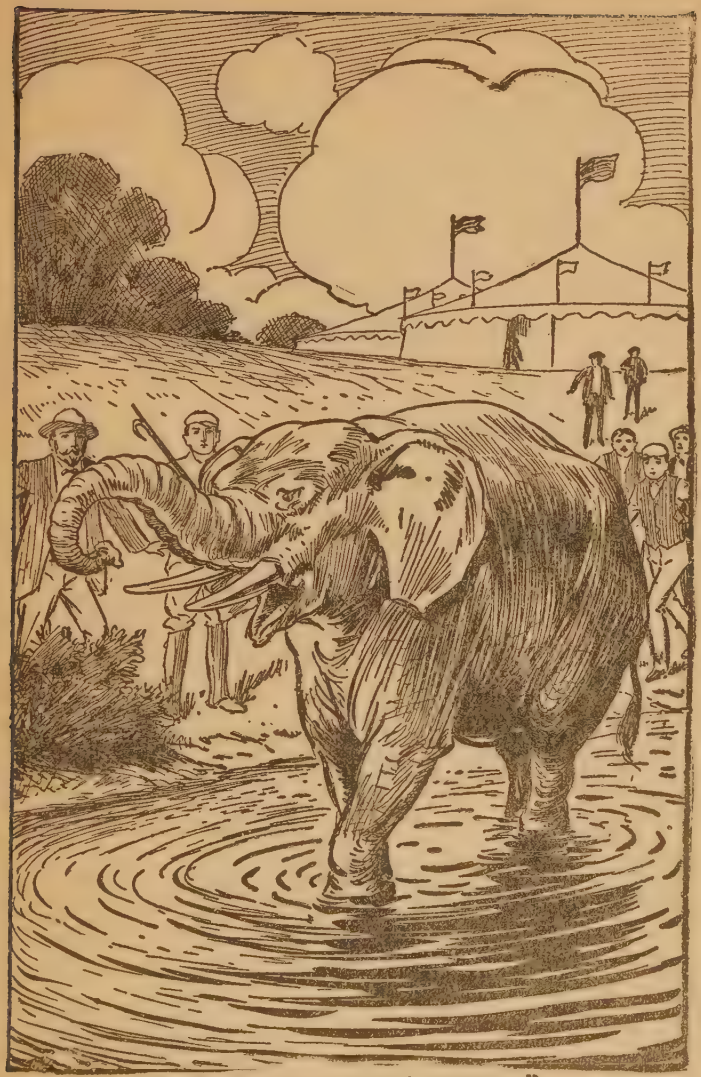
Into the water plunged Ajax, filling his trunk with it and spraying it all about. He took up his position in the middle of the stream, as if to bid defiance to his pursuers.

"Go slow now," cautioned Hank Servdon, who was the boss animal man. "I'll keep him engaged in front, while some of you sneak up behind and shackle one leg with a long chain."

It was a risky plan, but it worked. While Hank slowly approached Ajax from in front, wading out into the creek, with his elephant hook raised, ready to catch it in the sensitive trunk of the brute, other men approached through the water at the rear, holding in readiness heavy chains. Ajax concentrated all his attention on Hank, whom he doubtless hoped to treat as he had served poor Henyon.

"Ajax! Attention! Up! Up!" suddenly cried Hank, giving the beast the order to stand on his hind legs. Habit was too much for the brute, enraged as he was. With a trumpet of protest, he rose slowly.

"Now, men!" cried Hank, and in a trice two



"To bid defiance to his pursuers"

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chains had been slipped about the hind legs. Ajax was caught before he had gotten into town, but there was sorrow among the circus folk when they heard how grievously Bill Henyon was hurt. Ajax had caught him unawares, as the elephant man stooped over to adjust one of the chains that the big creature had pulled loose.

But the show must go on, no matter what happens to the employes or performers, and when the news got around that one of the elephants in the circus had nearly killed his keeper there was a bigger crowd than usual at the night performance, every one anxious for a glimpse of Ajax.

The brute had quieted down somewhat, but there was an extra fence of ropes about his inclosure in the animal tent, and he was so heavily shackled with chains that it would have been a task even beyond his terrible strength to get loose.

Every one in the circus was more or less nervous that night, and even the veteran performers on the high wire and on the flying trapeze did not feel so sure of themselves as usual.

Once, during a particularly long jump clear across the tent, when one of the trapeze performers swings loose to catch in the hands of another, there was a miscalculation, and the performer fell quite a distance into the net. After that Mr. Paine called the act off.

"It's too risky," he said. "I'm afraid something's going to happen to-night."

Perhaps all this got on Jack's nerves, for, though he was usually clear headed, he found himself feeling somewhat nervous as he climbed to the top of his platform, ready for his first leap with the flying machine.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed to himself. "What's the matter with me, anyhow? I'm thinking too much of poor Mr. Henyon. Well, here goes," and he launched himself down.

He landed safely, amid the laughter of the crowd at his queer act.

"I guess I'm all right," he thought. His success made him more confident, and he did the next two turns even better than the first. Then came the last one.

"I'm tired to-night," thought Jack. "I don't feel just like myself. Guess I must be getting homesick. Oh, but I would like to see dad and mom again! I wish I was back in Westville, even if the professor would have me arrested. Well, here goes for the last turn, and then I'm going to bed and sleep."

There was some delay in getting his platform over to the far side of the tent, where he was to make his last jump, and it was almost time for the final races when it was in position.

Jack climbed up, and his airship was hoisted up

to him. He did his customary song and dance, and then prepared to give his exhibition of flying. Yet in spite of the confidence that had come back to him when he found that he had done the trick three times successfully, he felt his nervousness returning.

"I guess I'd better take a tonic," he told himself. "Well, here goes."

He leaped forward, grasping the handle of the big umbrella that extended down through the distended bag. He expected to feel himself buoyed up as usual by the big Japanese affair, but as his feet began to work the pedals controlling the wings, and as he got ready to pull the strings to fire the shot and display the flags and rooster, he realized that something was wrong. The umbrella was not holding him up. In fact, he was falling swiftly to the ground.

The crowd not understanding that something was wrong, began to laugh as it always did, but there was terror in Jack's heart.

Suddenly there was a ripping sound, and the big umbrella turned inside out. Jack fell rapidly and heavily toward the earth, having no support to break his terrific fall.

As he landed, his hand unconsciously pulled the strings and the shot was fired, the flags fluttered out, and the rooster crowed. The crowd yelled and applauded, but poor Jack felt a pain in his left

leg as if some one had run a red-hot iron into it. Then it seemed as if some one had hit him on the head with a club. The lights, high up on the tent poles, died away. All became black, and Jack knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XXV

LEFT BEHIND—CONCLUSION

WHEN Jack regained his senses he found himself in a soft bed, and, as his eyes roved about they did not encounter the familiar hangings of the circus sleeping car. Instead, they saw a room neatly papered, and at a window hung with white curtains sat a young lady. Jack stirred uneasily. Perhaps he was dreaming.

The woman at the window heard him, and came over to the bed.

"So you're awake, are you?" she asked pleasantly. "How do you feel?"

"Rather—sore—and—stiff," replied Jack slowly. "What's—the—matter—with—my leg?"

"Oh, nothing much. It's broken, that's all; but the doctor says it's a clean break. You'll soon be better."

"My—head——"

"Yes, you got quite a bad blow on the head, and

you've been unconscious for several hours, but it's nothing serious."

"Unconscious for several hours?" repeated Jack more quickly. "Where's the circus?"

"It's gone on."

"Gone on? And—left—me—behind?"

He spoke more slowly, and he felt a queer sensation. A lump came into his throat. His eyes felt hot and heavy. Surely he couldn't be going to cry? Of course not!

"Left—behind!" he murmured. "They left me behind!"

"Why, they couldn't take you with them," said the pretty young woman. "You couldn't stand it to be moved, you know. But they felt dreadfully bad at leaving you."

"Who did?" asked Jack dully.

"Oh, ever so many. There was one big man with a red tie, Mr. Rain, I think he said his name was."

"Mr. Paine. That's the manager."

"Yes. Well, he gave orders that you should be taken good care of. Then there was a clown, I guess, for all the paint wasn't washed off his face when he came here. He left a lot of addresses for you, where the show would be."

"That was Sam Kyle."

"Yes; and then there was, oh, such a fat lady! She said she once had a boy just like you, and she

made me promise to give you chicken broth every day. You have a lot of friends in that circus."

"Where am I?" asked Jack, beginning to feel a little better at these evidences of care.

"Why, you're in a room at the hotel, and I'm a sort of nurse. Mr. Rain—I mean Mr. Paine—engaged me for you before he left. Now you're to be quiet, for the doctor doesn't want you to get excited."

"How long will I have to stay here?" asked Jack.

"Oh, about a month. But don't fret."

"A month? Why, the show will close then, and I can't be with it. Who'll do my act? I must go!"

He tried to sit up, but the pain in his leg, and the ache in his head, made him fall back on the pillow. The nurse gave him some quieting medicine, and he soon fell asleep. When he awakened he felt much better, though he was almost heartbroken at the thought of being left behind. He questioned the nurse and she told him what had happened.

There had been some flaw in the umbrella he used, and it had collapsed, letting him fall almost the entire forty feet to the ground. That he had not been worse hurt was regarded as very fortunate. The show had been obliged to go on, but Mr. Paine had left a goodly sum with the hotel proprietor for Jack's board, and had also left a

note telling the boy that all his savings, including his salary to the end of the season, would be held for him, and sent wherever he requested.

So there was nothing for Jack to do but to remain in bed. How he longed to be with the show, and performing his act again, even after the accident, no one but himself knew. He said nothing about it to the nurse, but there was a great longing in his heart.

The nurse and the hotel people were kind to him, but all the while the boy was becoming more and more homesick. He was worrying and fretting about his parents, and he had about made up his mind to write to Professor Klopper. This fretting did him no good, in fact it increased his fever.

"That boy has something on his mind more than merely being left behind by the circus," said the doctor to the nurse one day. "If he doesn't get quieter he'll have a relapse, and that will be bad."

"I'll see if I can't find out what it is," the nurse said. None of the circus people had told Jack's story.

The day after this Jack asked for something to read, and while the nurse went to get him a book she handed him a newspaper, published in a town not far from where Jack lived. He looked at it idly hoping he might see some item about the circus, but the show had evidently passed farther on.

Then, as he turned the pages, he caught sight of an item that gave him a sudden start.

For, staring at him, in black type on the white page, was this notice, dated from Westville, where he lived:

"INFORMATION WANTED concerning Jack Allen, supposed to be with a traveling circus. He left his home with Professor Klopper under a misapprehension. Everything is all right. If he sees this will he please communicate at once with the undersigned? A reward will be paid for suitable information of the whereabouts of the boy.

"SYLVESTER ALLEN."

"It's my father! My father! He's back from China!" cried Jack. "Hurrah! Dad's back! Hurry, some one! Get me a pen and paper. I'll write at once! No, I'll telegraph! Whoop! Now I'm all right!"

The nurse came running back into the room.

"What is it?" she asked. "What has happened? You must not excite yourself. You will have a relapse."

"I don't care if I do," cried Jack. "My father and mother are back from their trip around the world. They're back from China. I must telegraph them at once."

"Here, drink this. It will quiet you," said the nurse, thinking Jack was out of his mind.

"I don't want to be quiet! I want to yell and sing! Dad's home! So's mother! I'm all right now!"

It took him some time to convince the nurse that he knew what he was talking about, but when he had showed her the notice in the paper, and had told his story, she brought him a telegraph blank, and the happy boy sent a long message to his father.

How anxiously he waited for the answer! At last it came:

"DEAR JACK: We will be with you as soon as possible. Father and mother. The professor is coming, too."

"I don't know that I want to see the professor," mused Jack, "but I guess it must be all right, or dad wouldn't bring him."

Three hours later Jack was being clasped in his mother's arms, while Mr. Allen, with moisture in his eyes, was holding his son's hand.

"My poor boy!" said his mother. "To think of you being a clown in a circus!"

"It was bully fun, while it lasted," said Jack enthusiastically. "But I guess I've had enough of it.

But what happened to you? Why didn't you write?"

"We couldn't, Jack," replied his father. "We were detained in a province which was surrounded by warring Chinese factions, and we couldn't get out, nor send any word. When we did, your mother and I decided we had had enough of traveling around the world and we started for home. We got here, after sending word to the professor that we were coming, but when we arrived we found that you had run away."

"Did he—did he tell you what for?"

"Yes, Jack," said Professor Klopper, coming forward awkwardly. "And I want to beg your pardon. I—I fear I was a bit hasty."

"Then you know I didn't steal the cup?" asked Jack rather coldly.

"No one stole it. It fell down behind my bureau, and slipped into a hole in the wall where the plaster was off. I found it not long after you had —er—left so unceremoniously, and I wished I could have found you.

"Then when I got word from your folks, and I managed to learn that you had joined a circus, I went to the performance, though I do not believe in such frivolous amusements. But I could not find you to tell you the good news. I suppose you were with some other amusement enterprise, Jack?"

"No, I saw you," replied the boy, laughing now,

"but I kept out of your way. I was afraid you wanted to arrest me."

"Poor Jack!" whispered his mother. "You had a dreadful time!"

"Oh, not so bad," was the answer. "I earned about three hundred dollars, and I've got most of it saved up."

"Three hundred dollars, if put out at six per cent interest, and compounded, will double itself in eleven years, three hundred and twenty-seven days," remarked the professor thoughtfully. "I would recommend that you do that with your money. In less than twelve years you would have six hundred dollars."

"Not for mine," said Jack, with a laugh. "I'm going to buy a motorcycle as soon as my leg gets well. That's as near flying as I care to go for a while."

Jack was taken home as soon as it was practical to move him, and he and the professor became pretty good friends afterward, for it was no small matter for the dictatorial old college teacher to admit, to a mere boy, that such wisdom as could figure out the hardest problem in trigonometry could be wrong when it came to the simple matter of a missing gold cup.

Jack got his motorcycle, and a beauty it was, for when he received his money from the circus treasurer he found it was nearer four hundred than

three hundred dollars. Part of it he decided to save.

"Because you know," said Jack, "I might some day want to buy a flying machine, and if I put some money out at interest long enough I can get it."

With the check that represented his savings from the circus came a letter from the manager, stating that whenever he wanted an engagement he could have one. There were messages from all his friends, and a pass to the show good forever at any place where the Bower & Brewster circus held forth. And Jack often used it, taking with him some of his boy friends, and renewing acquaintance with the performers. But there was no such attraction as a clown in an imitation flying machine, though Sam Kyle and his fellows cut up some queer antics in the ring.

But if Jack ever felt any desire to go back to the circus life, he never told any one about it, for he had higher ambitions after that than to don a multi-colored suit and daub his face over with red and white paint.

THE END

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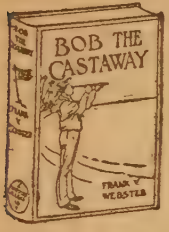

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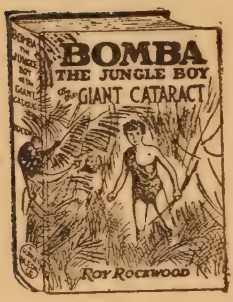

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